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THE IMPRECATORY PSALMS IN THE LIGHT OF THE EVANGELICAL MESSAGE

A Thesis

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by

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

The Nineteenth Century saw the rise of a religious movement which caused sharp conflict between different scholars in the broad stream of Christianity. Typical of this movement was the acceptance of the results of higher criticism concerning the Bible. The lines of conflict have been drawn, with varying degrees of clarity, between the scholars who accept these results and those scholars who reject them. There have been extravagant claims made by the proponents of both views, with the result that the vital issues and valid arguments involved have been often obscured by a fog of sentiment and prejudice. This is well-illustrated in the disputed interpretations of the Imprecatory Psalms.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. This study has been conducted with a two-fold purpose. First, it was the object of this study to apply the Liberal and Evangelical assumptions in an objective exegesis of the Imprecatory Psalms. Through this application of assumptions, which necessarily involved the discarding of invalid conclusions, it is to be hoped that any degree of morality and inspiration inherent in these

psalms may be shown forth more clearly. Secondly, it was the object of this study to make an objective exposition of Liberal and Evangelical assumptions and conclusions concerning the degree of morality and inspiration inherent in these psalms.

Importance of the study. There have been conducted a number of limited studies of the Imprecatory Psalms. However, this study has been done only in conjunction with other psalms. These studies have been deficient in two areas. First, there has been a lack of depth in examination. The psalms have not been studied as minutely as the alleged problems of morality and inspiration seem to warrant. Secondly, and most important, these studies have lacked necessary objectivity. Both Liberal and Evangelical Christians have attempted to prove their particular beliefs, which has resulted, in some instances, in an exposition of personal prejudices. There have been no notable efforts to examine these psalms as a separate unit, and upon their own merits. Rather, the studies have been conducted from the viewpoint of particular philosophical assumptions. In this study, there has been an attempt to avoid these hindering philosophical presuppositions that the psalms might be examined objectively.

II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Inspiration of the Bible. For the purposes of this study, the Fundamentalist belief in the verbal inspiration of the Bible will be rejected. Rather, the theory of plenary inspiration of the Bible will be propounded as the Evangelical view. Inspiration commonly means a quickening, an "in-breathing," coming originally from the Greek for the "breathing of God."[1] Plenary inspiration, as an interpretation of this general meaning, gives the meaning of an "embracing throughout (the Scriptures) the elements of superintendence, elevation, and suggestion, in that manner and to that degree that the Bible becomes the infallible Word of God, the authoritative rule of faith and practice in the Church."[2] The Liberal will generally reject even this definition of inspiration, contending that the Bible is the product of the best minds of the Hebrew nation, compiled throughout the ages.[3]

Imprecatory Psalms. These are those psalms which often employ expressions in the form of prayer or denuncia-

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[1]H. Orton Wiley, Christian Doctrine (Kansas City, Missouri: Kings Highway Press, 1940), p. 166.

[2]Wiley, Ibid., Vol. I, p. 170.

[3]David E. Roberts, and Henry Van Dusen, Ed., Liberal Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), pp. 224, 225.

tion, in which the judgments of God are imprecated upon the wicked.[4]

Higher Criticism. It is a process of scientific investigation for the purpose of determining the origin, original form, and intended value of literary productions. It is simply a process of study to determine certain truths concerning literature. Thus, higher criticism must be viewed as distinct from the results obtained, and from lower or textual criticism. There is nothing basically anti-religious in its intent, and it is a legitimate form of study when properly employed.[5]

III. PROCEDURES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In recognizing the Reformation Theology as the norm for Protestant thought, one finds many different theological positions both to the left and the right of the norm. One also finds that there is a semantic as well as a theological problem in differentiating between these positions. For the purposes of this study, consideration of the problem has been limited to those theological positions commonly known as Lib-

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[4]Samuel Terrien, The Psalms (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1952), p. 161.

[5]F. C. Eiselen, The Christian View of the Old Testament (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1912), p. 76.

eral and Evangelical in relation to Reformation Theology.

Rather than attempt to define these positions, an entire chapter has been devoted to a consideration of their characteristic principles and assumptions. In this way a more comprehensive view of the general beliefs may be obtained.

There has been an examination and comparison of these beliefs in the process of formulating the analytical exegesis. Where there was contradiction between the conclusions, an attempt was made to select the most reasonable result. Thus, philosophical assumptions were discarded when an examination of the actual text seemed to contradict the conclusion enforced by the assumption. It is to be hoped that a valid exegesis is the result.

Representative scholars were selected to present both the Liberal and Evangelical positions. The exposition of the two positions was accomplished by both exegesis and formulation of conclusions. In the exposition of the Liberal position by exegesis, documentation was included to set forth the differing school of thought. However, the Evangelical exegesis is not documented. Rather, the documented conclusions are those given by those scholars whose thought is represented in the exegesis. It will be noticed that in these Evangelical conclusions there are documented statements by men who would call themselves Liberals. This was done advisedly, for the

statements were the finest expression of the Evangelical position in that area, despite the fact that they were made by Liberals.

The text used in this study has been the American Standard Version. In following the study, it would be advisable to consult this for those portions of Scripture which limitation of space has caused to be omitted.

Finally, it will be noticed that the Psalms have been studied in the background of the entire Old Testament during the formulation of the analytical exegesis. This expanded study was prompted by the belief that to understand morality, there must also be an understanding of the life situation which shaped that morality.

CHAPTER II

THE BASIC CONSERVATIVE AND LIBERAL ASSUMPTIONS

Every system of thought or belief contains certain foundational assumptions. In no instance is this more true than in the dispute between the Evangelicals and the Liberals. These a priori assumptions may be categorized in six distinct but related areas: 1) That which constitutes the seat of authority; 2) The attitude toward the Bible; 3) The treatment of problems in the Bible; 4) The Weltenschaaung, or world-view; 5) The method of study of the Bible; 6) That which is regarded as the key to the Scriptures. A brief survey of the assumptions of the Liberals and Evangelicals will show the fundamental differences in these six areas.

Liberal assumptions. The Liberal rejects the adjective authority of the Bible, preferring reason to revelation. Even Liberals admit that "Liberalism has suffered from a serious unintentional lapse from the best Liberal principles; the tendency to interpret reason and experience as a substitute for Christian Revelation."[1] Many Liberals have realized the need for a closer cooperation

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[1]Walter Marshall Horton, Liberalism, Old and New (Sweet Briar College, 1952), p. 10.

between faith and reason.[2]

In substituting reason for Revelation, the Liberal has naturally formulated a skeptical attitude toward the basic integrity of the Bible The basic integrity of the Bible is unimportant to him, for:

> Each successive generation gains new and better knowledge of the world and our place in it. And any creed that is based upon reason rather than upon sacrosanct authority will be grateful for whatever the new knowledge may put at its disposal.[3]

Believing that there is no need to maintain the basic integrity of the Bible, the Liberal finds much in the Bible which is no longer valid. The problems of the Bible are treated in much different fashion than by the Evangelical, for the Liberal finds no literal value in the Scriptures.

> Primitive ideas of God were followed by higher ideas, and therefore the primitive ideas are no longer valid for us. We may therefore expect to find a great deal in the Old Testament which is in no sense normative for our faith or practice, since it belongs to the transcended past.[4]

One of the outmoded concepts in both the Old and New Testament is the heavy emphasis upon the supernatural. Naturalism is the key to the world-view of the Liberal. To

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[2]Horton, Ibid., p. 24.

[3]Roberts and Van Dusen, p. 160.

[4]H. H. Rowley, The Growth of the Old Testament (London, England: Hutchinson's University, 1950), pp. 23-24.

him, the whole supernatural element of historical Christianity has become indefensible for modern man.[5]

In discarding the supernatural element of Christianity, the Liberal has sought for a new interpretation of the Bible. This interpretation undertakes a reconstruction of the Bible, based upon literary, historical, and critical studies, in conjunction with reason. Basic to this study are four assumptions.[6] The first of these assumptions is that the Bible is to be judged by purely literary standards, in common with other literature. The second assumption claims that the books of the Bible are separate productions, and must be studied as distinct units. This necessarily precludes the possibility of explaining the meaning of a passage in one book by a correlated statement in another book. The third point upon which the Liberal bases his study of the Bible concerns the relation of the natural and the supernatural. While few would deny the Divine influence upon the soul, there are many who dispute the reality of the miraculous element in the Bible. The practical effect of this is to deny the immanence of God, except as taught by

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[5]Edwin Lewis, A Christian Manifesto (New York: Abingdom Press, 1934), p. 79.

[6]C. W. Rishell, The Higher Criticism (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1896), p. 35.

inference in the Bible. Others would admit the reality of miracles, but reserve the right to judge concerning the trustworthiness in each case. The final principle of study proposes that the Bible is the product of an evolutionary process. Liberalism holds that the principle of development is the only means whereby the Bible may be interpreted.

Thus, contemporary culture becomes the key to the Scriptures. It is felt that the perennial task of Christian Liberalism in every generation is to find out what is the most relevant to the existing condition of mankind, and most consistent with truth in other fields, accomplishing this through a sifting process.[7] "It is the essential genius of Liberalism to fit its message to the time in which it lives."[8]

It is seen, then, that the Liberal believes that the only authority is reason, which causes him to be skeptical in his attitude toward the Bible. This skepticism leads him to solve the problems of the Bible on an evolutionary framework, and derives a naturalistic world-view from the Scriptures. The Bible is studied through the use of philosophic principles of reconstruction. Contemporary culture

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[7]Horton, op. cit., p. 7.

[8]Ibid., p. 6.

becomes the key to the scriptures.

These are general points of agreement among Liberals. However, there are two outstanding schools of thought which differ in their interpretation of these basic assumptions. These two schools are called the Hegelians and the Form-critics.

The Hegelian school uses principles proposed by G. W. F. Hegel, the most influential philosophical idealist of the Nineteenth Century. It is a dialectical system, proposing a thesis, antithesis, synthesis method by which thought evolves into concrete reality.[9] Thus, a primitive culture with anthropomorphic ideas and an immoral or a moral system, charged emotionally with superstitions moves forward by thesis, antithesis, and synthesis to a more advanced stage of civilization. The end result of this process is a sophisticated culture with abstract ideas and a moral system, holding rational doctrines. Hegelians feel that Israel started out as a primitive society or culture, with all the accompanying cultural characteristics. Through cultural evolution and contacts with the other nations, Israel moved forward to a more sophisticated culture and higher religious life.[10] By

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[9]Herbert Livingston, "Syllabus for Old Testament Course 7" (Wilmore, Ky.: Asbury Seminary), p. 11. (Mimeographed.)

[10]Ibid., p. 13.

assigning references in the Psalms to certain periods, dating is made possible. These references also make possible the identification of the author, the origin and original content of the psalm, and that which has been added to the psalm. Included in these references are statements concerning the conception of God, contemporary morality, beliefs concerning angels, demons, hell, the after-life, and the supernatural in general. Although this destroys what seems to be the basic integrity of the Bible, and in effect denies the inspiration of the Bible, the Hegelian feels that this is a small price to pay for the better understanding he feels is attained.

This attitude toward the reconstruction of the Bible is also characteristic of the Form-critic, although he uses different methods. The aim of the Form-critic is to analyze the literary forms used by peoples to express their beliefs. The written forms were valid clues in determining oral forms.[11] This assumes that an undercurrent of belief and fancy in the culture is the fountain-head of theology.

Hermann Gunkel was the originator of this method, and although his books have not been published in English, there is adequate material written by his followers to make a fair estimate of the school. Using Genesis as his laboratory,

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[11] Ibid., p. 10.

Gunkel tried to find the specific life situation for each literary form or type. Applying this method next to the Psalms, Gunkel concluded that the uniqueness of the Old Testament lies in the fact that it is the product of Israel's collective genius, rather than individual authorship. The procedure used was to first collect existing variants of tradition. These were then arranged in a simple to complex pattern. It was then merely a matter of course to reconstruct the original form of the tradition.

Another important factor in form-criticism is the search for the Setz im Leben, or the situation in life behind the literary form.[12] It was found that the Psalms were closely related to ritual worship and priestly activity. In dating the Psalms, the form-critics generally assigned them to pre-exilic origins. However, dating was done only in a general way. The whole school is based upon evolutionary assumptions, which naturally affects the methods of dating.

Evangelical assumptions. The Conservative holds that the Bible is the objective authority by which all men must live. "The Bible is primarily a binding authority--a Divine regula--upon the whole way of life."[13] The Bible is authori-

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[12]John Paterson, The Praises of Israel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 196.

[13]H. B. Kuhn, What is Evangelical Christianity? (Ft. Wayne, Indiana: First Missionary Church, 1953), p. 56.

tative because it is Divinely inspired. The authority of God comes to man through the Scriptures, and this idea of the Bible is founded upon its inspiration by God.[14] The Evangelical does not feel that this inspiration is an irrational thing.

> It is fundamental to the Protestant view that the Spirit in the Scripture appeals to the Spirit in the Christian, and the Spirit in the Christian not being irrational distinguishes between the religious value of Paul's request for his cloak and his praise of love.[15]

> The inspiration of the Scripture is in its fullness of the life of God, not absolute fullness at any one time, but relative fullness according to circumstances, preparation, civilization, and pedagogical tact and necessity.[16]

It is held that the Bible is inspired because the Bible has a peculiar inward vitality, a power to convince man that it is God speaking, and the marks of a supernatural character in its production that clears from the mind any reasonable doubt that the Scriptures are an authoritative message to man.[17]

This authoritative message to man is understood only as one knows Christ. "The Bible is the Word of God because

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[14]John Faulkner, Modernism and the Christian Faith (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1921), p. 20.

[15]Ibid., p. 10.

[16]Ibid., p. 41.

[17]Kuhn, op. cit., pp. 53-54.

it has Christ in its center, and He is the Lord of the Scriptures."[18] Just as the sun is the source of the light of the moon, so Christ is the Light which is reflected from the pages of the Bible. "The true Word of God is Jesus, and the Bible is the Word of God because it testifies of Him."[19]

Because Evangelicals accept the necessary supernatural implications of the inspiration of the Bible, they find it possible to hold a supernatural world-view. To the Evangelical, there is a three-story world, as pictured in the Bible. This consists of the earth, Heaven and Hell.[20]

> The redeeming facts upon which the Christian hope is based were things done by the Lord Jesus Christ, and those facts involve the entrance into the course of this world of the creative power of God; in other words, they involve the supernatural.[21]

This emphasis upon the supernatural affects the interpretation of the Bible by the Evangelical. He uses wither allegoric or sermonic methods to interpret the Scriptures. He also is concerned with harmonizing the the problems, in order that his beliefs concerning the

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[18]Faulkner, op. cit., p. 48.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Amos Binney and Daniel Steel, Theological Compend (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1902), pp. 145-147.

[21]J. Gresham Machen, What is Christianity? (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951), p. 257.

Scriptures might remain inviolate. The basic integrity of the Bible is important to the Evangelical, and he therefore defends it. Based as the Evangelical belief is upon the authority of the Bible, it is natural that they would be polemic in their attitude toward it. Machen, although designating himself a Fundamentalist, expresses the Evangelical point of view when he says, "A Christianity that avoids argument is not the Christianity of the New Testament."[22]

It is seen then that the Conservative accepts the Bible as authoritative, is polemic in his attitude, tries to harmonize the problems of the Bible through allegorical and sermonic interpretations, and holds a supernatural world-view, believing as he does that Christ is the key to the Scriptures.

In applying his basic assumptions to the Imprecatory Psalms, the Evangelical tries to defend their morality and maintain their inspiration. He feels that they are units in themselves, written by one author. While Evangelicals do not reject higher criticism as such, they reject many of the results obtained through this type of study feeling that they are colored with philosophical assumptions. The traditional viewpoint is assumed, until it can be shown that the text itself would prove tradition wrong.

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[22] Ibid., p. 127.

CHAPTER III

AN ANALYTICAL EXEGESIS OF THE PSALMS

Psalm Thirty-five.

The View of God. The Psalm opens with an anthropomorphic conception of God as a warrior. Although doubtless this figure comes from the traditional concepts of God formulated during the Exodus, those who believe that David is the psalmist feel that this idea also arose from the daily mode of life and thought of Israel's great warrior-king. Whatever the interpretation of the origin of this figure, there is nothing basically unedifying about it. It is the natural result of the psalmist's emphasis upon the immanence of God.

This immanence may be traced throughout the entire Psalm. An example of this is seen in verse 22. "Thou hast seen it, O Jehovah; keep not silence: O Lord, be not far from me." The immanence of God is the key to this entire Psalm.

Because God is not totally transcendant, He is able to give the assurance desired in verse 3. If God were not able to hear and aid, the prayers would be pointless. Jehovah has pleasure in the prosperity of His servants, and is pleased by praises (vs. 27). However, the emphasis upon the nearness of God does not detract from the reality of His

power.

God is conceived of as being fully capable of protecting the souls of his servants (vs. 17). The all-sufficiency of God is seen in verse 10, "Who is like unto Thee?" It is against the background of this great power that God is further pictured as a divine Judge.

Jehovah is not a capricious "Oriental Potentate," as some feel the Old Testament depicts Him. Rather, He is an ethical God. His judging is according to righteousness (vs. 24). He is interested in justice (vs. 23) which is an important concept in the interpretation of this and the other imprecatory Psalms.

The View of the Enemies. In any description of these men, it must be remembered that a subjective viewpoint is employed by the psalmist. Despite the allowances which must then be made, these enemies emerge as totally immoral. They are only destructive and malicious (vs. 7). They have perjured themselves in active ingratitude (vss. 11, 22). When the psalmist fell into adversity, they took cowardly advantage of it to come against him in company, rejoicing at his misfortune (vss. 15, 16). The enemies are profane men, in the continual practice of violent deeds (vss. 15, 16). This was no mere persecution of the psalmist, but total war, bent upon destruction (vs. 17). Their attacks were upon the peaceful people of the land, as well as upon the psalmist

(vs. 20). In their pride, these men would boast that they had caused the downfall of the psalmist (vss. 19, 21, 25), and then rejoice over the destruction of one whom they have no cause to hate (vs. 19).

The Psalmist. In the consideration of the description of the psalmist, it must be borne in mind that this is his testimony about himself. In effect, he is his own character witness. However, this must not be allowed to impeach his witness, for he is giving his testimony, not to man, but to a righteous Judge, and asking for that justice which is due unto him (vss. 24, 25).

In the light of this consideration, it is seen that the psalmist is one who enjoys a close relationship with God, but desires assurance (vss. 1-3). Praise comes naturally to his lips, and his trust is in God (vss. 9, 10). In his dealings with his fellow-men, this man was no cold, harsh legalist. His was not a cloistered virtue, but he had expressed a costly compassion toward the affliction of those who were now his enemies (vss. 12-14).

There are different indications as to the identity of this man. Despite the reference to the people of the land in verse 20, the general use of the singular leads one to conclude that this is an individual speaking for himself. This is evidently a prominent example of the battle between right and wrong, with the righteous of the nation (vs. 20--

"those at peace in the land") looking to him as a "test-case." The Jewish Psalter gives this Psalm as a cry of distress from David when he was being hunted by Saul. There is nothing in the Psalm which would disprove this ancient tradition. Rather, the circumstances and the above interpretation would seem to support this claim.

Certain resemblances have been noted with the language in the Book of Jeremiah in which the prophet also cries out in his affliction. Like circumstances may well account for the similarity, or the prophet may have been well-acquainted with the Psalm and used its expressions in his dilemmas.

The Imprecations. There is a continuation of David's picture of a Warrior-God driving back an enemy army in full rout (vss. 4-6). Notice that there is not a request for their lives, not that they even be harmed physically. The key to this metaphor is "confounding." In the final imprecation, (vs. 26) physical harm is not sought. Rather, complete shame, humiliation and confounding is once again the prayer.

These imprecations are not baseless, for these enemies have attacked him without cause, that they might take his soul by treachery (vs. 7). While the imprecations center about his own troubles, there is also present a sense of corporate responsibility (vss. 20, 27). Despite the

character of the foes, David does not multiply their punishment in his prayer, but merely asks that they be repaid by God for their sins.

Psalm Fifty-five.

The View of God. Once again, there are anthropomorphic references to the "ear" of God, and to God "hiding." However, these references do not show a necessarily inferior conception of God, for even today it is common practice to speak of God "touching" one who is ill, and healing him. The basic premise of this Psalm is that God will hear the prayers of the righteous, and will punish the wicked (vss. 16, 23).

God's power is sufficient to destroy the wicked, for He has saved the psalmist in the past (vs. 18). This saving immanence continues to operate, even as God has saved from eternity (vs. 19, cf. 90:2, 93:2). Verse 1 gives "Elohim," the Supermundane One, but verse 16 refers to God as "The One who is savingly immanent in history." God is pictured as a Burden-bearer, a Sustainer, One who stablizes the way of the righteous (vs. 22).

Thus, the entire Psalm shows a picture of a righteous God who supports those who serve Him in righteousness, and who sets his face against the wicked. Keil and Delitzsch bring out the significant contrast between the names of God

used here.[1]

The Enemies. These men are blood-thirsty workers of iniquity (vs. 2). As one reads this Psalm, the first description of the enemies of the psalmist gives the typical picture of a bully. They are angry, oppressive men, intimidating with their words (vs. 3). However, the next description is a picture of a warmonger in the fullest and worst sense of that word. They are violent, warlike, and continually causing iniquity to flourish. They are fraudulent men, and oppress to that extent which they feel is safe (vss. 9-11). The very nature of these men was wickedness, or, as the Hebrew gives, "wickedness was in their inward parts." They had been wicked so long that their houses were filled with evil (vs. 15).

The description of the enemies shifts suddenly from the wicked in general, and centers upon one man, evidently the leader. This leader is one who had been a close friend of the psalmist, one who had given counsel, and who was considered by the psalmist to be his equal. Despite the fact that these men had shared the sacred intimacy of worship, this man has turned upon the psalmist to destroy him (vss.

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[1]Franz Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament, The Psalms, Vol. III, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), p. 420.

20, 21). The crowning treachery was that this enemy had profaned his covenant (vs. 20). The full religious significance of this is seen in Numbers 30:2. A covenant was triangular oath, between these two men and God, and was completely binding. When this former friend broke the covenant, he sinned not only against the psalmist, but also against God.

The picture of his enemies given by the psalmist is dark. It is clear that he considered them to be wicked and immoral, led by one who had treacheously sinned against both his own person and the honor of God.

The Psalmist. Here is a man who is deeply troubled in spirit, one restless and suffering (vs. 2). He is fearful for his life, and overwhelmed with horror (vss. 4, 5). If it were possible, the psalmist would flee the city, but instead he turns to God in prayer (vss. 6-9). The morality of that prayer will be considered below. This decision shows the essentially peaceful and trusting nature of the psalmist. The psalmist is a man of prayer (vs. 17) and has received the blessings of God in close communion in days gone by (vs. 18). It seems significant that the psalmist seems to reach the climax of the Psalm after the imprecations, and trusts fully in God's ability and righteous willingness to deal with the enemy (vss. 22, 23). The key Psalm ends with a note of trust and resignation.

The Psalm gives little in the way of a concrete situation which would identify the psalmist. According to tradition, the Psalm is connected with Absolom's rebellion, and the treacherous leader is identified as Ahitophel in the Targum and the Ethics of the Fathers. This must necessarily have been written during the time before David was forced to flee the city, for here the psalmist merely seeks to escape. The fact that the psalmist, did not flee when he saw the open conspiracy indicates that it might have been David, for he would have hesitated to relinquish authority, restrained by a sense of Divine commission as King. The gentle spirit of the psalmist is in accord with the well-known gentleness of David.

The Imprecations. These imprecations plainly ask for the death and damnation of those who are against the psalmist (vss. 9, 15). Verse 15 is a reference to Numbers 16:30, 33, where the rebellious followers of Korah were swallowed up by an earthquake. It is noteworthy, however, that after each of these imprecations there is given a reason, of justification for the curse. This curse centers in the character of the men who oppose David, and is not contrary to the law of the times, the Law which Moses gives both in Exodus and Deuteronomy. There seems to be no atonement given in the various offerings for those men who willfully sin against

Jehovah, as these enemies are characterized. Morality is not relative, except as God changes the standards of morality by a further revelation of His will. Since Christ is the full revelation of God's will and nature, modern morality must be of a higher order than that of David. However, David's morality was ethically as perfect as is ours, for his whole prayer was in accord with the Law of Moses.

There is primarily a lament form in this Psalm, as evidenced by the spirit which is shown by David. He is not vindictive, but troubled, and ends his lament with faith in God. He neither limits the time of retribution, nor asks to have anything but Jehovah for sustenance and strength. Those imprecations which he does utter are in accordance with the Mosaic Law, and are caused by his lament. They are not to be fulfilled by human agency, but by Jehovah's avenging righteousness.

Psalm Fifty-nine.

The View of God. To the Hebrew mind, God was a very real and concrete person. Here is seen an example of this concrete conception of God. He is conceived of as a high-place (vs. 1), and a high tower (vss. 9, 16, 17). Reference is also made to Him as a refuge in the day of distress (vs. 16). This reflects the contemporary fortresses of the day, and the belief that Jehovah would be their protection, rather

than stronghold.

Once again, the immanence of God is brought forth, for man can enter into close personal relationships with Him (vss. 1, 4). The psalmist promises to praise God, and feels confident that this will please Him (vs. 16). Despite the immanence of God, there is also seen the great might of Jehovah.

God's power is sufficient (vs. 8), and He can laugh at the efforts of the wicked to overthrow the righteous (vs. 8), for He is the God of Hosts, over all nations (vss. 13, 5). This Divine strength is to those who have entered into relationship with Him (vs. 17).

It is significant that the psalmist not only portrays God as being almighty, but also characterizes Him as showing lovingkindness. The people of the heathen nations not only believed that their gods were rulers over them in their nations, but also feared these rulers. The concept of a God of divine love and mercy was entirely unique with Hebrew people. However, the psalmist recognized that God was not only lovingkindness and mercy, but also a God of justice. (Compare Psalm thirty-five.)

It was to this justice that appeal was made (vs. 5). The prayer of verse 12 is a prayer for the punishment of sinners, of which more will be said below.

To this psalmist, God was a powerfully saving, immanent

Being, who entered into relationships with those who would serve Him. To His servants, God showed mercy and lovingkindness, but was forced by Divine justice to punish the wicked.

The View of the Enemies. The psalmist opens the prayer with a supplication for aid from God against his enemies, and then proceeds to detail their wickedness. They are blood-thirsty workers of iniquity (vs. 2). These enemies are mighty, and would seek David's very life (which is a better translation than "soul") by joining forces in a conspiracy (vs. 3). In a graphic metaphor, the enemies are described as a pack of pariah dogs, common to all oriental cities, who are mild and cowardly in the day, but dangerous in the dark of night. Evidently these men had hated the psalmist from afar, and now in the night of his adversity sought to kill him (vs. 6). Here is an example of practical atheism, for these men believe that if there is a God, He will not hear their evil words (vs. 7). They are proud men, sinning by their curses and lies. It is felt by some that these "curses" are magical formulae used against the psalmist, but the Hebrew does not support this view. Literally, it should be rendered, "the word of their lips (is) the sin of their mouth," which may be paraphrased, "their mouth sins by each word of their lips." Thus, the curses and lies are not magical in content, but rather blasphemous. The enemies refuse to recognize the power of the God of Jacob (vs. 13).

These enemies, in common with the wicked of the other imprecatory Psalms, are seen to be immoral men, harming society by anti-social actions, and denying the very power of God. They are numerous, and God alone is sufficient to deal with their hatred.

The Psalmist. It has been seen that the God to whom the psalmist is praying is merciful but just. In the face of this belief, the psalmist dares to pray for God's aid. The implication thus is clear that the psalmist believes himself to be righteous. It has been seen that the psalmist has a belief in a personal relationship with God, so he would know if this relationship were broken by sin. Thus, a consideration of the morality of the psalmist drives us to believe that he either is a righteous man as he claims, or that he is an arrant liar claiming a false relationship with God.

If he were lying about his righteousness, it seems hardly logical that he would express himself as utterly dependent upon God for his aid (vss. 16-17) and make no personal threats against the enemies. He rises to a high point at the end of the Psalm, when his faith touches God, and he is assured that God will help. For that reason, he states that his enemies may express their hatred in any manner they wish, but that nothing will disturb his trust in God (vss. 14-17). Since the psalmist is clearly a moral man, it must remain to

be seen if his utterances are immoral.

The identity of this psalmist will help in determining the morality of his prayer. The traditional view is that this was David, writing at the time when Saul sent sentries who watched the house to kill him. Although the language of the Psalm is appropriate to the incident named, the authenticity of this tradition has been called into question because the enemy is mentioned as nations in verses five and eight. Thus, it is contended that the lesser powers of the post-exilic period have conspired to attack Judah. In further support of this view it is pointed out that the name for God is here "Yahweh Sabaoth," the designation for the God of battle array of Israel.

There are two answers to this objection against the traditional view. Some feel that there has been an addition of the fifth verse to the Psalm at the time it was adapted for liturgical use. They cite the difference in the name of God in verses three and five as proof of this change. However, the nations of verse nine are explained as being the neighboring peoples who oppress Israel without cause.

Nevertheless, the second seems to be the more valid of the two. A study of Psalm Seven will show that a prayer for a judgment upon personal enemies is expanded into a prayer for a judgment upon all the enemies of Israel: and in that general judgment the treacherous Israelites who are

iniquitously plotting against the psalmist's life will meet with their just reward. This seems to be another instance of this change from the singular to the corporate and back to the singular. By this explanation there is no need to formulate a double hypothesis, as is necessary in the former instance.

It may be accepted, then, that David was the psalmist. His prayer may be seen to be as the anointed one of Israel, although he had not yet taken the throne. Thus, his prayer which expanded from the personal to the national lament loses the taint of selfishness.

The Imprecations. It must be noted that these imprecations do not in any instance call for the physical destruction of the enemies. David is not asking for death. Rather, he clearly calls upon God not to slay the foes (vs. 11), and asks that they be taught that God is the ruler of the earth (vs. 13b). If they were dead, it would be futile for them to learn of God's power. Therefore, if the passage which asks for their consumption be interpreted literally, it means that David was beside himself in rage. This clearly is not the case, for immediately before and after he "loses control," he asks that the enemies be spared. Thus, when he asks that they be consumed in wrath, and that they be no more, it is clearly a request for the destruction of their power for evil

(vs. 13a) while they learn the needed lesson about Jehovah (vs. 13b).

Also to be noted is the fact that the only agent for the punishment of the wicked is God. The major thrust of these imprecations is two-fold: 1) that the people may know that God is on the throne protecting the righteous against the wicked (vs. 11), 2) that the enemies might learn to at least take cognizance of the power of God throughout the earth (a religious prayer for the enemies). The justification for the imprecations lies in the moral honor of God, who of necessity must protect His name through the preservation of His servants from the power of the wicked.

Psalm Sixty-nine.

The View of God. A basic premise of this Psalm is the belief that God is willing and able to save the afflicted psalmist (cf. vss. 14, 33). God is mentioned directly as a God of deliverance and salvation in verses 1, 13, and 29. Divine deliverance is also implied in verses 16-18, and 35-36. The basis of this salvation is the employment of Divine might motivated through goodness and lovingkindness (vss. 13, 16).

God is known as good and loving because He enters into relationships with those people who will serve Him (vss. 3, 6, 16, 17, 33, 35-36). The Divine deliverance is not limited

primarily to salvation from enemies, but extends to salvation from sin. This is accomplished through truth, and the redemption and ransom of the soul (vs. 13, 18).

It is this salvation from sin which makes a man righteous in the sight of God, who knows the righteous (vs. 28). God also knows about the sins committed in the world, and will punish all who sin, including those with whom He has entered into relationship (vss. 5, 26).

Thus, it is recognized that God would rather have true service through praise and thanksgiving than the mere sacrifice of an animal (vss. 30, 31). This is a recognition of the spiritual nature of God, and is reminiscent of the high conception held by the prophets.

The View of the Enemies. These enemies are mighty and many. They hate the psalmist falsely and without cause (vs. 4). There is no pity in their hearts, for when the psalmist sought for pity and comfort, they gave him that which in his physical need for food and drink would actually poison him (vss. 20, 22). The word for gall used here is also translated as hemlock, and must be considered as a poisonous herb. The chief sin of these harsh men is the theft of God's glory. They act as if they are the ones who have brought the psalmist to his present condition, when it is actually a punishment from God (vs. 26). Because they

have the psalmist in their power, they are making him restore possessions which he did not take wrongfully (vs. 4). The character of these men is summarized in verse 27, which says that they are known as iniquitous in God's sight.

The Psalmist. Here is a picture of a man ill and in deep distress. Reference is made to his illness in many instances. (Cf. vss. 15, 26, 29.) His distress of spirit is also made plain (vss. 1-3, 7-8, 14-15, 17, 20). The psalmist evidently feels that this illness is an operation of the Law of Retribution, for he confesses his sin (vs. 5), which he says caused Jehovah to smite him (vs. 26).

However, there is also the plea that many of his troubles and distresses stem from his zeal for the Lord. This zeal springs from great devotion, for he has chosen between his family and his service for the Lord (vss. 8, 9). He is evidently in a position where he is regarded as a righteous man, and therefore his illness makes him the target of the slanders of the wicked (vs. 9). There is a sense of social responsibility for those who look up to him (vs. 6), and also the implication that it is necessary to defend God's name, for the psalmist reasons that those trusting in Jehovah will be ashamed at his fall (vss. 7-10). Thus, he asks that God save him. This is an unselfish prayer, and must be considered in the interpretation of this Psalm.

The deep insight of this psalmist into the nature of God, as seen in verses 30-36, causes one to believe that here was a man who had close fellowship with Jehovah. The entire picture presented here is that of a righteous man beleaguered by wicked enemies.

When the identity of this righteous man is considered, there are many possible answers. It is obviously not the corporate personality speaking. However, there are no concrete indications as to the exact time of this Psalm. Some would say that this is the writing of the Prophet Jeremiah. This surely could be the key to this Psalm, for his history closely parallels this Psalm's general setting. However, Jewish tradition gives the author of this Psalm as David. David is plainly the great type of Christ in the Old Testament, and there are seven New Testament references which refer to this Psalm as typico-prophetic. There is nothing to disqualify David as the author of this Psalm, and with the combined weight of Jewish tradition and the witness of the New Testament it seems reasonable to accept a Davidic origin.

A note of caution must be injected here, however. The use of the typico-prophetic as a proof for authorship may lead to serious difficulties. If it is to be accepted that Christ was sinless, verse five must be ruled out as falling into the prophetic. The typico-prophetic therefore may be applied only to certain portions of the Psalm, as it is cer-

tain that all of David's experiences and utterances are not of this type.

The Imprecations. There are two groups of imprecations here. Group one, consisting of verses 22-25, is terminated by a further detailing of the evil acts of the enemies (vs. 26). Group two, verses 27-28, are the most fierce, dealing with the spiritual destination of the opposition. There can be no denial that this Psalm deals with both physical and spiritual retribution.

Group one builds in intensity, asking that the enemies be troubled constantly, even when they are eating, and then asking that they be afflicted with a physical malady. This disease may be the same one which David suffers, for there is a noticeable parallel between David's failing eyesight (vs. 3), and the imprecation in verse 23. Group two invokes God's fierce wrath upon the enemies because they have taken credit for God's action.

The pivot consideration must be taken as the evil character and actions of the enemies, as witnessed by the interruption occasioned by verse 26. The imprecation in verse 28 is two-fold. The book of life, as given here, should best be translated as the book of the living. David was thus asking that these enemies might die by God's hand. Once again, this refers back to verse 26, and is actually

seeking that God's honor be upheld. While this seems a harsh conception of God's activity in support of His honor, one must only study God's actions during the Exodus to see a definite parallel. It must also be remembered that David lived by those laws and conceptions of God's will and nature which were as yet unfulfilled in Christ. The request that the enemies might not be written with the righteous must be seen as actually claiming a definite promise of God, as recorded in Exodus 32:32,33. Nor was this a call for eternal damnation, for the clear concept of ζωὴ αἰώνιος was unknown until New Testament times.

The key to these imprecations must then be seen as the evil acts and character of the enemies, and the law of the times. God's honor was at stake, and David sought to uphold it by the code of his day.

Psalm Eighty-three.

The View of God. The entire motif of the Divine person in this Psalm is that of saving immanence. In verse one God is pictured much as if He were a Divine Spectator. The imploring psalmist seeks God's participation in the dramatic struggle which is even now being formulated. The implication is that if God does not immediately take the psalmist's part, there will be a national tragedy.

The reminder that God has a covenant with Israel, and

therefore, a moral obligation to save her is found in verse three. This covenant relationship is emphasized throughout the Psalm by such expressions as "O my God" (vs. 13). The use of the name Jehovah is in itself a reminder, probably to the psalmist as well as to God, that God has promised by his very name to be savingly immanent (vs. 16, 18).

To say that God was completely immanent, in the sense of localizing him in Israel, or by making Him a tribal or national God, would be a mistake. It is clear that God was conceived of as Ruler of all the earth, and not merely as the God of the Hebrew people (vs. 18).

The major emphasis upon the character of God is thus seen as His saving immanence, as testified by the frequent reference to His covenant relationship to Israel. However, the recognition of His world-wide dominion is also a recognition of His power, and a willingness to enter into a relationship with all the earth, conditional upon the humbling of the nations (vss. 17, 18).

The View of the Enemies. It is noteworthy that the first characterization of these enemies depicts them as God's enemies, rather than the enemies of Israel (vs. 2). They are seen to be proud rebels, lifting up their head against God. Their hatred is expressed actively in their persecution of God's people (vs. 3). This is an expression of the Hebrew

belief that those who harm Israel, God's people, are striking at God. The object of these enemies is national annihilation (vs. 4). These nations who are persecuting Israel have formed a unanimous covenant against God (vss. 5-8).

The corporate character of this league must be considered in the interpretation of the Psalm. These were not individuals but nations. This will be important in the consideration of the imprecations.

The Psalmist. It is clear here that this psalmist is speaking in framework of a corporate personality. He does not make pleas for his own person, but rather for the salvation of the people of God. He is their representative in pleading against the hostile nations. This may be seen further by noting that the description of the afflictions are not personal but national.

It is therefore more important to date this Psalm than to determine the identity of the author. It has been felt that this Psalm was suitable to the time of Nehemiah. However, internal evidence would place it earlier than this date. In verse five the Hebrew is literally translated, "they have cut a covenant." This is an allusion to the ancient practice of ratifying a solemn vow by dividing a sacrificial animal and passing between the halves. Thus it was that the enemies of Israel had mutually bound themselves

to accomplish their hostile purpose. Since this custom had passed out of existence at the time of Nehemiah, it may be seen that the Psalm was written at an earlier date.

The only other period in Israel's history which suits the conditions described in the Psalm is that described by the traditional view, namely the time of the wars of Jehosophat. While some would make this Psalm to be an expression of the general attitude of Israel toward Gentile nations, which in turn were types of all hostile heathendom, it seems more reasonable to place the Psalm at the time of Jehosophat.

The Imprecations. The imprecations open with a call for God to defeat the nation's enemies as He had done in the past. The imprecations here (vss. 9-12), are a call for the death of the people who would fight against the people of Israel. Bearing in mind the belief that these enemies were fighting against God when they attacked Israel, it is seen that in the mind of the psalmist this was a call for the vindication of God's honor. With the intense feeling of which the Oriental is capable, he sought to protect the name of his God, for he felt that a victory on the part of these enemies would be a blot on the reputation of Jehovah. If he were to terminate his prayer at this point, it would be understandable, in the light of his background. The sacred writings of the Hebrew people, which are now known as the Old

Testament, are full of the promises of God to save His people from their enemies. Furthermore, God had in many instances Himself demanded that the enemy be slain for their wickedness. He had commissioned the people of his covenant to do this. There is no indication that the psalmist had any desire to kill the nations himself, but rather the tone of the Psalm indicates that he was trusting God to vindicate Himself. It is also noteworthy that these imprecations were against the league, but did not mention individuals by name. It is much easier to be harsh with an impersonal group of enemies than to seek the death of an individual. However, the imprecations move from this relatively low plane to a much higher one.

The psalmist asks that God utterly confuse the Nation's enemies and fill their hearts with terror (vss. 13-16a). The motive is that they might seek to know God, for this is what is meant by the reference to seeking His name (vs. 16b). He asks then that their pride in their prowess be permanently destroyed (vs. 17a). In interpreting "let them be confounded and perish" (vs. 17b), it would be a direct contradiction, if this were a reference to physical life, rendering the verse following nonsensical. They could not know the power of Jehovah as the Ruler of the earth if they had perished. The obvious interpretation then must be that the life destroyed would be that national life that separated them from God.

Thus, the means of teaching them the rule of Jehovah are seen not to be necessarily judicial or punitive, but unto salvation. These imprecations then take on a note of missionary zeal rather than harsh vindictiveness.

It is objected, that verse 18 is a gloss. There is no internal evidence in the verse, in its language or structure, which would indicate that it is a gloss. Thus, such a claim based solely upon philosophical principles may be rejected.

The imprecations admittedly start out on a low level, which actually was the everyday plane of Hebrew thought based upon God's revelation of Himself in history. This level is then transcended through the inspiration of God's spirit, and although the psalmist may not have realized the full implications of his utterances, they take on a missionary forever.

Psalm One Hundred Nine.

The View of God. God is seen here in three aspects of His Divine nature. The first is that of a God who remembers iniquity, and punishes sin. The second lies in His goodness and lovingkindness in delivering the righteous and needy. The third aspect is His acceptance of praise.

It is recognized by the psalmist that the God to whom he is praying, punishes sin (vss. 14, 15). This Divine dis-

pleasure in wickedness forms the basis of the imprecations against the enemies.

God's deliverance is motivated by His nature of goodness and lovingkindness (vss. 21, 26, 31). The kindness of God is shown forth by His deliverance, and because His nature is kindness or mercy, He will deliver.

The praise of the one delivered is the desire of God. This shows a relization of the spiritual nature of God reminiscent of the prophets. (See the view of God in Psalm Sixty-Nine.)

God's nature then is conceived of as three-fold, as outlined in this Psalm. He is holy, punishing sin, but delivers the needy who call upon Him. This deliverance springs from the very nature of God as characterized by mercy or lovingkindness. Finally, God is shown as One who delights in the praise of those whom He has saved.

The View of the Enemies. The description of the enemies lies in two principal passages. These show the progressive decline of a man who turns from God. (Cf. Psalm One.)

The first description tells of men who are deceitful, and bear false witness. They have hated their neighbor without cause, despite the fact that he has shown his love for them in prayer. For good they have returned evil, and hatred

for love (vss. 2-5). In the second description, it is seen that these men, for the singular pronoun must be interpreted in the corporate sense, have committed both sins of omission and commission. The psalmist points out that they have forgotten kindness, and failed to bless their neighbors (vs. 16). Because these men did not bless, they actively practiced cursing of blaspheming against those whom they hated. In a vivid picture, the psalmist shows how this cursing and hatred took complete possession of the men, and saturated their entire being. "He clothed himself with cursing as with his garment, and it came into his inward parts like water, and like oil into his bones" (vs. 18). These are not imprecations, but historical facts which are reported through observation.

This observation is psychologically sound, for it is now recognized that the man who continually hates and carps will warp his whole personality. The same principle was expressed vividly by Christ, when He said, "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." Thus, it is seen that these enemies were men who, through their own volition and choice, had warped their whole being toward evil, with the result that they spoke evil against the psalmist (vs. 20).

The Psalmist. It is seen above that the men were evil in their opposition of the psalmist. The natural supposition that follows is that the psalmist was therefore righteous.

The integrity of the psalmist is seen clearly in this Psalm. He speaks of himself as the servant of Jehovah (vs. 23). Elsewhere he speaks of praying for his enemies, of loving them, and doing good to them (vss. 4, 5). By his own testimony the psalmist is an upright man.

At this point the psalmist's testimony is supported by two external factors. The first supporting factor lies in the declaration of the psalmist's intention to praise God for His deliverance. This in itself connotes faith in God's mercy, which the psalmist could not have claimed had he been sinful. The second factor lies in the realization of the nature of God which has been shown above. (See The View of God.) Realizing that God is of such essential nature that He must punish sin in justice, the psalmist prays that He would deal with him for his name's sake, or according to His essential nature. If the psalmist had been a sinner, he surely would never have done this. The righteousness of the psalmist, his basic morality before God, must be remembered in dealing with the imprecations.

This righteous man is suffering the pains of physical disease as well as the pain of persecution. There is no indication that he would avenge himself against his enemies if it were in his power, but rather his confident expectation is in God (vss. 21, 29-31).

If the authorship of David is accepted, Saul or Doeg

may be accepted as the leader of the enemies. If Davidic authorship is rejected, there is no clue as to the circumstances or time of the Psalm. In this instance, the authorship is relatively unimportant in interpreting the Psalm. Some would feel that the Psalm is of Davidic origin in the early Persian period, with Maccabean glosses, but there is little textual reason to follow this conjecture.

The Imprecations. This Psalm has two groups of imprecations, consisting of verses 6-15 and verse 19. It is often held that verses 16-18 and 28-29 are also imprecations. However the grammatical construction would make these first verses (16-18) a description of the fate of the enemies. It is the psalmist's recognition of the natural consequences of the evil character of these men.

In the first group of imprecations a judicial situation is the basis of the metaphor. The prayer that a wicked man be set over the enemies, and an accuser stand close by (vs. 6), is actually a reference of what the enemies have done to the psalmist (vs. 2), and thus is in accord of the law of the times, which demanded an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. To condemn the psalmist for following his code of morality is in effect to condemn the entire Mosaic code of Israel, which had not yet been fulfilled by Christ. It was not the purpose of Christ to condemn the law, but rather

to perfectly show forth the Father and thus fulfill the law (Matt. 5:17, 18). Then the psalmist asks that the guilt of the man be disclosed by the verdict (vs. 7a). It was the theology of the day that a sinner's prayer became an abomination to God, or a sin, if he prayed as an innocent man (Prov. 28:9). Verses 8-12 are admittedly in conflict with the gospel of Christ, but are harmonic with the code of the day. The strict view of sin which was held by these Old Testament characters, which seems so harsh to modern thought, showed no mercy to the sinner who deliberately transgressed the Law. The fearful consequences of disobedience are outlined in Deuteronomy 28. The sense of unity of the family which caused Achan's family to die with him for his sin is also shown here (cf. Joshua 7). Verses 14 and 15 are not a demand that the parents of the enemies be counted guilty once again for past sins. Rather it is a reference to the sins of the enemies, and a demand that Jehovah will remember the evil of these children's parents and destroy evil from the face of the earth.

The second imprecation, which resumes where interrupted by the description of the degradation of the enemies, is seen as the just reward of the evil ones, dealt them by Jehovah. This mantle of evil was the personal choice of the enemies, and the psalmist asks that God fulfill their desire.

It is often held that the imprecations in this Psalm

as in other imprecatory Psalms, are magical curses or formulae, designed to bring a spell upon the victim. Variation of this view proposes that the psalmist is the one suffering from the spell of a sorcerer, and these imprecations are magical formulae to return the spell upon the one who has cursed him. A comparison of the imprecations in this Psalm with a Ugaritic formula will reveal the validity of these claims.

> Set thou a wicked man over him;
> Ane let an adversary stand at his right hand.
> When he is judged, let him come forth guilty;
> And let his prayer be turned into sin.
> Let his days be few; let another take his office.
> Let his children be fatherless, And let his wife
> be a widow.
> Let his children be vagabonds, and beg,
> And let them seek their bread out of their deso-
> late places.
> Let the extortioner catch all that he hath;
> And let strangers make spoil of his labor.
> Let there be none to extend kindness unto him;
> Neither let there be any to have pity on his
> fatherless children.
> Let his posterity be cut off;
> In the generation following let their name be
> blotted out.
> Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered
> with Jehovah;
> And let not the sin of his mother be before Je-
> hovah continually,
> That he may cut off the memory of them from the
> earth;
>
> (Vss. 16-18 are usually included in the protion
> which is described as a magical formula.)
>
> Because he remembered not to show kindness,
> But persecuted the poor and needy man,
> And the broken in heart, to slay them.
> Yea, he loved cursing, and it came unto him;
> And he delighted not in blessing, and it was far

from him.
He clothed himself also with cursing as with his garment,
And it came into his inward parts like water,
And like oil into his bones.
I invoked you, gods of the night,
Together with you I invoked the night, the veiled bride.
I invoked the twilight, midnight, and dawn,
Because a witch has bewitched me,
A sorceress has paralyzed me.

Stand by, O great gods, hear my complaint!
Judge my case, give heed to my procedure!
I have made an image of my sorcerer and my sorceress,
Of my conjurer and my witch,
Have placed it at your feet and I am pleading my case:
Because she has committed evil and planned wickedness,
May she die, but I live!
May her sorcery, bewitchment, and spell be dissolved!
May the tamarisk, whose crown is luxurious, purify me!
May the date palm that braves all the winds, release me!
May the juniper-tree, which is full of dust, cleanse me!
May the pine-conex, which is full of seeds, release me!
In your presence I have become bright like grass,
Cleansed, purified, like nard.
The conjuration of the witch is evil,
Her word has returned to her mouth, her tongue is firmly stuck.
May the gods of the night smite her on account of her sorcery!
May the three night-watches remove her evil charms!
May her mouth be tallow, her tongue salt!
May she, who pronounced the evil work against me, melt like tallow!
May she, who cast the spell, dissolve like salt!
Her knots are loosened, her machinations have come to naught,
All her words fill the steppe,
Upon the command spoken by the gods of the night.

. . .

Burn my sorcerer and my sorceress!
As for my sorcerer and my sorceress, speedily may
their lives be extinguished!
But me keep alive, so that I may praise thy greatness and sing thy glory.[2]

There is a resemblance in these passages of the Ugarit formula and the Hebrew Psalm in that both promise praise for the deliverance of the sufferer. However, the Hebrew psalmist appeals to the lovingkindness of God as the primary motive for deliverance. The Ugarit shows a crude conception of the power of the spoken word to compel the gods, but the Hebrew trusts in God's action because His nature is merciful.

A marked difference in procedure is also evident. The Ugarit formula invokes the notice of "hex" images by the gods that they might practice imitative magic upon them. The psalmist merely calls forth the remembrance of the evil deeds done, that the righteous Jehovah will punish them. The Ugarit formula also makes use of magical nature objects, such as the pine cone full of seeds, while the Psalm has no mention of this type of practice. Perhaps the most noticable difference is the lack of alleged morality on the part of the Ugaritic sufferer. There is no reference to a sorcerer in the Psalm, while the magical formula mentions it repeatedly.

The general difference in tone of the two writings is

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[2]Issac Mendelsohn (ed.), Religions of the Near East (New York: Liberal Art Press, 1955), pp. 229-231.

apparent to those who will study them. There seems to be no real connection between the two types of literature.

Having seen that there is no reasonable ground for supposing that these imprecations are magical curses, there remains one more consideration which must be noticed. This Psalm is another of those which might be classed as typico-prophetic. The New Testament recognizes the chief enemy in this Psalm as being a type of Judas, and regards the imprecations to some degree prophetic of the fate of the betrayer of Christ.

Psalm One Hundred Thirty-seven.

The View of God. The worship of Jehovah is seen here to be closely linked with the city of Jerusalem. This does not necessarily mean that the Hebrews believed that Jehovah was confined to the nation of Israel. Rather than being a mere national God, Jehovah was early known to be the Ruler of the earth (cf. Psalm 83:18). The meaning here is that God's worship was centered in Jerusalem, and that these Babylonian exiles could not bear to sing of Him while scornful captors looked on.

The Enemies. There is no clear characterization of the enemies in this Psalm. It is clear that they are the Babylonian captors. The word which is translated "wasted"

in verse three means literally, "tormented," and thus, this verse could also be translated as "Our tormentors required of us mirth." Whether this torment was physical or mental, the anguish was real to the captives. These tormentors may have been unwittingly cruel in Babylon, but they had followed the heathen custom of disposing of encumbering children by dashing them against the wayside rocks as they marched their captives back to the conqueror's city (vs. 9).

The Psalmist. The identity of this psalmist does not show itself in this Psalm. His entire individual personality is lost as he speaks for the people. The locale of the Psalm is probably Babylon, during the time of the captivity, although it might be reasonably believed that this was the product of one who had returned to Jerusalem and seen its wasted condition. The important consideration in the psalmist's identity is his identification with the Jewish community who would serve God.

The Imprecations. These imprecations are directed against two separate peoples. The close kin of Israel, Edom, had conspired in the downfall of Jerusalem, and had helped the Babylonians raze the foundations. The evil consequences of the retaliatory code of the day are clearly shown in the circle of bad turns exemplified. The age-old enmity between these related nations had led the Edomites to help in the

destruction of Jerusalem. Now Judah, as exemplified in the psalmist, calls for the destruction of Edom in retribution. However, the circle of bad turns is broken here, for no longer was the agent of this retribution to be human, but Judah asks that God remember the behavior of Edom.

This trust in the Divine is also a factor in the imprecation against Babylon. There is no indication that the Hebrew people would personally dash the Babylonian children against the rock, although this would be permissible by the Lex Talionis. Rather, this is left to those who would conquer Babylon. It must be remembered that the prophets of Israel had said that Babylon was to be cut off as a nation because they had corrupted their role as the purging agent in the hand of God. This seems to be symbolic language originating from that prophetic thought which had been pronounced by Jeremiah (Jer. 25:12, 50:1-20). Rather than a desire that Israel be allowed to destroy Babylon, it is a symbolic prayer that the prophecy of Jeremiah be fulfilled and Babylon's posterity be destroyed, that it might cease to be a nation among nations.

The imprecations must be understood then, as being prayers for Divine rather than human vengeance, and the fulfillment of prophecy.

CHAPTER IV

THE LIBERAL INTERPRETATION

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the interpretations of representative Hegelians and Form-critics. Special emphasis has been placed upon the dating of the Psalms, the stage of development in Hebrew religion shown, and the morality of the Psalms.

This has been done through a study of the commentaries on the Psalms by four representative scholars. These scholars: The Hegelians, W. O. E. Oesterly and Heinrich Ewald; and the Form-Critics, Moses Buttenweiser and Elmer Leslie, have been studied according to their schools. There has been no attempt to set the two schools of thought at variance. Rather, any differences of opinion, both between and within the schools, must be recognized as the personal differences of the men as shown by an objective study.

In this study of the Liberal interpretations, certain general trends have been observed. Therefore, there has been an analysis of these trends that representative conclusions might be formulated.

I. PSALM THIRTY-FIVE

Text of Imprecations.

Let them be put to shame and brought to dis-

honor that seek after my soul:
Let them be turned back and confounded that
devise my hurt.
Let them be as chaff before the wind.
And the angel of Jehovah driving them on.
Let their way be dark and slippery,
And the angel of Jehovah pursuing them.
. . .
Let destruction come upon him unawares;
And let his net that he hath hid catch himself:
With destruction let him fall therein.
. . .
Let them be put to shame and confounded together
that rejoice at my hurt:
Let them be clothed with shame and dishonor that
magnify themselves against me.
(Vss. 4-6, 8, 26)

The Hegelian Interpretation.

Oesterly. The dating of this Psalm must fall in the late Maccabean period. The Psalm itself may be an echo of the enmity between the orthodox and the hellenistic Jews.[1] It has clearly been changed from its original purpose that it might be used in the ritual of worship.[2]

The original basis of this Psalm is a piece of ritual which might be used in serious legal cases. Since the early days of Moses, Jehovah had been the Supreme Court of appeals. When a case was judged too hard for the courts, lots were cast, and it was believed that Jehovah caused the results to

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[1]W. O. E. Oesterly, The Psalms (London: S. P. C. K., 1953), p. 215.

[2]Ibid., p. 216.

indicate the truth of the matter. These expressions in this Psalm indicate that the implied physical violence may be metaphorical, intended to emphasize the spontaneous malice of the accusers, and thus enhance the accused's case before Jehovah.[3]

Proof of the early original basis for this Psalm may be seen in the portrayal of Jehovah. This conception of God must not be taken too literally, but there is no disguising the fact that He is pictured in a very unedifying manner. The antique figure of a Warrior-God appears here, showing an undeveloped concept of God.[4]

The author of this Psalm was writing in the individual sense. There is no indication that he was speaking for the community as a whole.[5] For this reason, it must be admitted that while this Psalm shows a true religious spirit in leaving vengeance to God, it falls below the standard of most of the other Psalms.[6]

Ewald. From the dispersion came many religious songs,

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[3]Ibid., p. 215.

[4]Ibid., p. 217.

[5]Ibid., p. 216.

[6]Ibid., p. 218.

of which this and Psalm 38, its companion, are good examples.[7] The poet, while pursued by mighty warriors (vss. 2, 3), has fallen dangerously ill (vs. 15). The complaint of this Psalm is in the individual sense, but there is a gradual broadening of vision which covers the scope of the battle between good and evil in the poet's world.[8]

It is to be noted in this Psalm that the poet is of the stricter party of the worshippers of Jehovah. This is probably what has caused the initial conflict. This close relationship with Jehovah is the reason that there is a note of faith at the conclusion of this Psalm, although this faith may be seen wavering in the body of the poet's lament.[9]

The Form-Critic Interpretation.

Buttenweiser. Although the large amount of disorder found in this Psalm makes dating difficult, it may be shown that it falls in the Persian period from Darius I to Artaxerxes II Mnemon. No specific date need be fixed, for the general dates of 520-359 B. C. are satisfactory.[10] It is a

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[7]Heinrich A. Ewald, Commentary on the Psalms (London: Williams and Norgate, 1881) Vol. II, p. 50.

[8]Ibid., p. 51.

[9]Ibid., p. 50.

[10]Moses Buttenweiser, The Psalms (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), p. 364.

companion piece to Psalms 7, 9 and 10.

As a result of the large amount of disorder which it has suffered, Psalm 35 is generally believed to be an inferior product. When put in its original form, the Psalm is a spirited piece of religious poetry, in which the "I" of the nation is personified.[11] Proof for this may be found in the reference to the "peaceful people of the land." The opening lines are even more conclusive, for it would border on the comic if an individual who is harassed by personal enemies were to make such a plea as is found in verses 1-3.[12]

Pleading for the nation, the psalmist gives a picture of the present situation which makes clear that foreign nations are the enemies. These enemies have complete control of the land, and are opposed to the peaceful people whom they have conquered. Seen in the light of the conditions which inspired its composure, the opening lines of the Psalm become very clear in meaning. The psalmist is using these words to impress upon the minds of his countrymen the utter helplessness of their situation without the aid of God.[13]

The imprecations, which are wishes that the evil of the enemies may recoil upon their own heads, are written in

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[11] Ibid., p. 448.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., p. 449.

this vein. There is no power in the hands of the people to do what they would like to inflict upon their enemies, and therefore, they must call upon God to punish the wicked who have requited good with basest evil.

Leslie. The form of this Psalm implies a judicial situation. The procedure is clear. The suppliant is faced with wicked witnesses who perjure themselves that he might be convicted of an imaginary crime (vss. 11, 21).[14] Nor is this judicial procedure a light matter, for they seek the life of the psalmist, who fears the capricious and incalculable justice which was the order of the day.

Outstanding in this Psalm are the lament themes of verses 11-16 and 20-21. The whole Psalm is marked by a tone of desperation which is overcome only in verses 9, 28, 10, which must be arranged in that order, and the brief hymn of praise to God in verse 27.[15]

The imprecations in the Psalm are the result of this intense desperation. They are not strong enough in tone to be actually called curses. Rather, they are passionate wishes as to the ultimate fate of the psalmist's enemies, and his own final vindication. These are expressed in the

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[14]Elmer A. Leslie, The Psalms (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949), p. 370.

[15]Ibid., p. 371.

concrete language of the Oriental, and must be viewed in this light.[16]

II. PSALM FIFTY-FIVE

Text of the Imprecations.

> Destroy, O Lord, and divide their tongue;
> . . .
> Let death come suddenly upon them,
> Let them go down alive into Sheol.
> (vss. 9 and 15)

The Hegelian Interpretation.

Oesterly. The psalmist begins, in language appropriate for a hymn of distress, with a plea that Jehovah hear and answer his prayer. He has been very restless, and his heart has been troubled within him by the evil machinations of his wicked enemies (vss. 3-6).

It is natural that in such circumstances that the psalmist should turn to thoughts of vengeance. He incorporates in his prayer the old story of how Jehovah had confounded the men of Babel. Nor is his trouble the only instance of evil oppression, for his case is typical of the general situation (vss. 9-11).

From the general evil about him the psalmist turns to the consideration of the enemy who has harmed him the most.

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[16] Ibid., p. 370.

This man was an intimate friend, and it is probable that the psalmist and his adversary were priests attached to the sanctuary.[17] (Cf. Psalm 42:4 in connection with verse 14.) After this consideration of the treachery of his former friend, there comes so sudden a break that it must be considered the result of a mutilation of the text.[18]

The Psalm resumes near the end with a curse upon the enemy, and the background is the story of Dathan and Abiram (cf. Numbers 16:31-33). The poet resumes once again with a plea concerning his own need, and a promise to observe the special hours of prayer (vs. 17). This mention of the special hours of prayer does not necessarily prove a post-exilic date, for the custom may have been ancient.[19] A renewed consideration of the evil of the enemy results in a belief that God will answer the prayers of the righteous, and the Psalm ends with a renewed contrast between the premature fate of the wicked and the psalmist's happy trust in Jehovah.

There is little to indicate date. The style and language would suggest the post-exilic rather than the pre-

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[17] Oesterly, op. cit., p. 285.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., p. 286.

exilic period.[20] The imprecations were normal among the ancient Hebrews, but certainly not confined to them. The value of the Psalm lies in the spirit rather than in the doctrine it expresses. The faith and trust of the man would overshadow the spirit of vengeance common to his day.

Ewald. There is first an urgent entreaty to God for help from the danger which has threatened him, and so deadly is this threat that he would wish to flee from the city into the desert for peace (vss. 1-8). Turning from this prayer, the psalmist sees violence and civil discord which so affects him that he wishes for the annihilation and punishment of all evil counsels and deeds (vss. 9-11, 12-15). He then turns from these imprecations to a final rest in Jehovah through complete trust (vss. 22, 23).

This is a graphic picture of the contests and dangers of Jerusalem (vs. 10) in the last century before its destruction.[21] Among all classes of people there is constant baseness and schism, with the result that friend easily betrays friend. The most forceful of all these schisms is between the orthodox and the ones who take a frivolous view of the ancient religion.

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[20] Ibid., p. 284.

[21] Ewald, op. cit., Vol. I., p. 253.

The Form-Critic Interpretation.

Buttenweiser. Psalm 55 is not a unit but is composed of three unrelated fragments: a) verses 1-12, 17-20, Psalm 55A, b) verses 13-15, 21-22, Psalm 55B, and c) verses 16, 24.[22] The complaint of the writer about the treachery of a trusted friend, Psalm 55B, were misplaced from elsewhere in the course of transmission, for they contradict the theme of 55A, which is a description of a city under siege.[23] Verses 16, 23 are misplaced from Psalm 57A, and originally formed its conclusion.[24]

The psalmist is not speaking as an individual in Psalm 55A, but employs the corporate personality to portray the common misery. It comes from the incident when Ptolemy laid siege to the city.[25]

This might have been written as late as 312 B. C.,[26] and is another eloquent testimony of Israel's unshakeable faith in Jehovah. There is no need to consider the morality of the imprecations as affecting the inspiration of the Psalm, for

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[22]Buttenweiser, op. cit., p. 707.

[23]Ibid., p. 708.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Ibid., p. 709.

[26]Ibid., p. 710.

it has been seen that they are not original portions of the main body.

Leslie. This Psalm will be considered in order of its two portions. The first part of the Psalm, 55A, consists of verses 1-18b, 22. The second portion is a fragment, containing verses 18c, 21, 23.[27]

There are concrete details embodied in Psalm 55A. Jerusalem is the city mentioned, and is described in the troubled period when Palestine was overrun by Ptolemy's forces (312 B. C.).[28] The details of the anguish of the city are heightened in tragedy by the personal tragedy of the psalmist himself. As if the siege of beloved Jerusalem were not sufficient to break his heart, the very leader of his personal enemies is a man who was formerly a close friend, with whom he had shared the intimate fellowship of temple worship.

Turning to the man himself, the psalmist addresses him with feeling of deep injustice, which vents itself in passionate imprecations. These imprecations, found in verses 14c-15, are part of a ritual spoken originally by the priest on the behalf of the innocent sufferer, that he might escape

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[27]Leslie, op. cit., pp. 332-534.

[28]Ibid., pp. 332-333.

from the evil words spoken by the enemy.[29] Then comes the climax of the Psalm in the promise, which is quite similar to an oracle, uttered by the priest (vs. 22).[30]

The second portion of this Psalm comes from a situation similar to Psalm 120. The wild Edomite tribes of northern Arabia have made a covenant with the psalmist, who speaks for the nation, but they have no intention of fulfilling their agreement (vss. 18c-20).[31] The smooth deceitful words of the enemy make the danger even more critical (vs. 21).

The psalmist's confidence in God rises at this point to a height from which he can confidently view the future violent punishment which will be sent upon them from God (vs. 23).

In the consideration of the imprecations of this Psalm, it must be realized that there was a great deal of overstatement in the use of the ritual. The symbolic significance of the statement of the evil and desired punishment was necessarily heightened by dramatic speech.

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[29] Ibid., p. 333.

[30] Ibid., p. 334.

[31] Oesterly, op. cit., p. 269.

III. PSALM FIFTY-NINE

Text of the Imprecations.

> Be not merciful to any wicked transgressors.
> . . .
> Slay them not, lest my people forget:
> Scatter them by thy power, and bring them down,
> O Lord, our shield.
> . . .
> Consume them in wrath, consume them, so that they
> shall be no more:
> And let them know that God ruleth in Jacob,
> Unto the ends of the earth.
> (vss. 5c, 11, 13)

The Hegelian Interpretation.

Oesterly. The first verse is actually a summary of the whole Psalm. The psalmist is beset by foes, workers of iniquity, and blood-thirsty men (vss. 1b-2). The attack which is made is unprovoked, either by the psalmist or his people, and therefore he feels justified in seeking that God punish the evildoers. A metaphoric picture of scavenging dogs runs throughout the Psalm, showing the psalmist's feeling for the enemies.

Divine protection is sought throughout the poem. When the poet considers God, he realizes anew the love, strength, and vengeance which He makes available, (vss. 8-10). The thought of vengeance provokes passionate imprecations. Verse 11 shows a temporary mood of the psalmist, in which he asks that the enemies be spared but shaken, that their fall may be a permanent reminder of the power of God. This mood

passes, and extreme longing for vengeance takes its place. Evidently magical curses had been employed against the psalmist; their sin lies in the word of their lips (vss. 12-13). With a lack of logic which seems strange to us, the Psalm depicts the offenders as learning the universal supremacy of the God that ruleth in Jacob by their annihilation (vs. 13b, c).[32]

Despite the seemingly incoherent appeal for Divine vengeance, the Psalm closes upon a note of exultation at the prospect of deliverance.

The dating of this Psalm is almost impossible. While there are phrases which suggest national rather than individual persecution, there are also indications which suggest an individual speaking. This might be explained by corporate personality, but one cannot be completely certain.

The psalmist is a pure monotheist, and believes that God is concerned in the government of the world, ultimately vindicating His people. This does not raise him above the level of his times, for he still hates his enemies.

Ewald. The psalmist here is obviously a prince or a king in a besieged city.[33] The heathen people who seek after

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Ewald, op. cit., p. 290.

his life are depending upon their false accusations to be substantiated (vss. 6, 15). They have for several days blockaded the city, planning at night and plundering by day. The poet has but one confidence, as expressed in the Messianic concept which is found in this Psalm.[34]

His expression of that confidence is in three stages. The first is a lively cry for Divine aid, a description of wickedness, and a rising confidence in God's intervention. Then, the danger presses forward into his consciousness again, but this time in contrast to the glory and majesty of Jehovah. Finally, the Messianic hope arises so high that the whole third portion of the poem is filled with the confident expression of deliverence, overflowing into a shorter fourth and concluding section.

In consideration of the major imprecation, verses 11 and 13, it is seen that these are inspired by the Messianic hope felt by the king. He asks that God allow these people to come to such a place of pride that they will destroy themselves by blasphemy, thus setting forth another permanent moument that God rules in all the earth, delivering those who serve Him.[35]

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Buttenweiser, op. cit., p. 715.

The Form-Critic Interpretation.

Buttenweiser. In this, as in Psalm 55, the psalmist is the nation personified. This is seen clearly when the description of the sufferings of the capital is considered. There is also the petition that the God of Israel arise to punish and heap derision upon all the heathen, and the psalmist's urging in verse 11 that God "Delay not, lest my people forget thy name." The closing lines, "Then will it be known to the ends of the earth that God rules in Jacob," complete such strong evidence that this is a community Psalm that only by changing the text itself can the individualistic interpretation be supported.[36]

The Psalm is a product of those years when mercenary armies overran Palestine before Jerusalem was conquered by Ptolemy. This places the date between 318-312 B. C.[37] It is a description of the hardships suffered by the entire land, but dwells especially upon the sufferings of Jerusalem during the nightly raids of the plundering hordes.

The sufferings described in this Psalm have not produced the deep spiritual values of Psalm 55. It is generally spiritually inferior. In considering the imprecation in

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[36] Ibid., p. 716.

[37] Ibid.

verse 13, one may see that there has been a common error in translation and interpretation. The "let them know that God ruleth in Jacob," is absurd, and must be rendered "then will it be known."[38]

Leslie. The psalmist, an individual, calls upon God from the Temple, that God might hear and deliver him from his false accusers. The suffering endured is not physical, for the weapons of the evil enemies are not swords, but words of abuse and defamation.[39] There evil accusers are not heathen, or nations, as is generally supposed from some of the metaphoric language in the Psalm. "Visit all nations," (vs. 5) as is the case in Psalm 56:7b, is evidence of the influence felt from the king's Psalms, where the enemies are heathen nations.[40]

In asking that God visit the enemies, the psalmist does not wish destruction or ruin to be heaped upon them. Rather, he wants them to be restrained from their arrogant deeds, and to become keenly aware that Jehovah rules over the people of Israel in loving concern and holds the ends of the earth in regal control.

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[38] Ibid., p. 717.

[39] Leslie, op. cit., p. 356.

[40] Ibid., p. 358.

IV. PSALM SIXTY-NINE

The Text of the Imprecations.

> Let their table before them become a snare;
> And when they are in peace, let it become a
> trap.
> Let their eyes be darkened, so that they can-
> not see;
> And make their loins continually to shake.
> Pour out thine indignation upon them,
> And let the fierceness of thine anger overtake
> them.
> Let their habitation be desolate;
> Let none dwell in their tents.
>
> . . .
>
> Add iniquity unto their iniquity;
> And let them not come into thy righteousness.
> Let them be blotted out of the book of life,
> And not be written with the righteous.
> (vss. 22-25, 27-28)

The Hegelian Interpretation.

Oesterly. The psalmist is deeply touched in body and spirit, and thus pours forth a conflicting and rapidly alternating utterance of his complaint. There is no clear explanation of the cause of the enmity which besets him, but it evidently has to do with the service of God.

It is this emphasis upon the suffering endured because of the service of God which causes the date to be placed in the Greek period. This is further supported by what is said in verse 35 about Zion and the building of the cities of Judah.

The Greek period was a time of religious confusion,

and the psalmist had attempted to prevent some unseemly procedure in the temple. This is the explanation given by the early church (cf. John 2:17).[41] The result was vindictive action upon the part of his enemies.

Because of the peculiarly vicious action of the enemies, the psalmist bursts out in a series of magical curses which, although natural enough, make a painful impression.[42] These curses were intended to cause the sin of the enemy to recoil upon his own head. Verse 22 is the curse, and the next few verses are the effects.

"May their eyes be darkened," the first sign that poison is having its effect; this is then followed by a trembling of the limbs. For greater potency the psalmist asks that God will exterminate their families. The reason for all this is given in verse 26.

However, there are more distasteful words to come.

> Add iniquity to their iniquity; the horrible desire is here expressed that God would cause them to sin so as to justify the divine chastisement of them; 'and let them not see thy righteousness' means, 'and let them not be justified by thee;' righteousness is used in the forensic sense of declaration of guiltlessness. And finally there is the cruel petition: 'Let them be blotted out of the book of the living,' in reference to the belief that God kept a register of the living; if the names no longer appeared there it meant that they would die.[43]

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[41] Oesterly, op. cit., p. 330.

[42] Ibid., p. 331.

[43] Ibid.

Although these imprecations, and similar utterances which occur in other Psalms, sound terrible to modern ears, it was considered a legitimate means of inflicting retribution.

The beautiful hymn of spiritual praise which follows these imprecations is very different in content. The psalmist rose above his disturbed state and rested his faith in God.

In consideration of the concluding verses, 35-36, it is doubtful if they belong to the Psalm in its original form. They contain an eschatological picture which is out of harmony with the rest of the Psalm.[44]

Ewald. The psalmist utters an individual complaint, describing the conditions and sufferings which he is forced to bear. There is a short, urgent cry for help, in which the evil deeds of the enemies are detailed, and then a turning to God in fresh devotion. The cause of the persecution lies in the devotion to God's worship, and the knowledge of this causes the psalmist to rest his case upon God's loving-kindness. However, the bitter sorrow and scorn to which the psalmist is subjected causes him to break out into a long curse, which eventually gives relief to his spirit, and he rises triumphantly to faith in God's ultimate justice and glory.

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[44] Ibid., p. 332.

The long imprecation may be pardoned on the grounds of the complete bewilderment of the period and the too gentile heart of the poet.[45] The psalmist employs many plays of thought and word. This is seen in verse 27, "Add iniquity to their iniquity." This is better translated, "Give guilt according to their guilt," and means that God should punish according to the deserved guilt.[46] Although this imprecation is fierce, there must be borne in mind the fact that the psalmist finally did find relief in the contemplation of the spiritual service of God and the prospect of restoration of the cities of Judah.

It is partly this reference to the destroyed cities of Judah which causes the date to be placed immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem.[47] The Temple had been destroyed, and the people dispersed, but the worship was still carried on by men such as the psalmist.[48]

The Form-Critic Interpretation.

Buttenweiser. The assurance with which the psalmist expresses his conclusion that God will save Zion from oblit-

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[45]Ewald, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 67.

[46]Ibid., p. 72.

[47]Ibid., p. 71.

[48]Ibid.

eration shows that the psalmist is praying not for rescue from personal peril but for the preservation of the nation.[49] Verses 1-3 and 14-15 speak of the threat to the nation's existence. It is this peculiar corporate personality which gives these Psalms their intensely personal character.[50]

The Psalm is clearly post-exilic.[51] The only possible occasion upon which the Psalm could have been written was the attack of Ptolemy in 312 B. C.[52] Verse six is seen as a reference to the many proselytes to Judaism which were in Jerusalem at that time. The destruction of Jerusalem would surely shake their faith. This reference to the proselytes illustrates the well-known missionary fervor which caused the Jews to be despised in their zeal.

This zeal for the house of God might seem to be in contradiction to the imprecations of the Psalm. However, if one is sincere, it must be admitted that the natural impulse would be to call down maledictions upon the enemy.[53]

Leslie. The prayer of the psalmist is both for his

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[49]Buttenweiser, op. cit., p. 728.

[50]Ibid.

[51]Ibid., p. 729.

[52]Ibid.

[53]Leslie, op. cit., p. 378.

personal problems of illness and indictment by enemies and the support of the watching community of the righteous. The strong sense of social responsibility which is shown in verse six makes it clear that the psalmist is a leader in the congregation.[54] It is his conviction that his sufferings are actually in behalf of God, and that he must bear them in loyalty to God and his people (vss. 7-12). Although the lament descends to a low moral plane in the description and execration of the enemies, the eventual result of the psalmist's prayer is wonder at the dealings of God with his own life.[55]

It is this wonder at God's mercies to him which leads the psalmist to the certainty of God's eventual deliverence of Zion from its distress and the restoration of the Judean cities in abiding stability across the following generations. The references of this Psalm to the priestly oracle in the Temple (cf. Psalm 55A), the developing spirituality of verses 30-31, and the internal distresses of Judah all point to the fifth century B. C.[56]

Although there was real development in the spiritual concepts of the psalmists of this time, this did not prevent

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[54]Buttenweiser, op. cit., p. 731.

[55]Leslie, loc. cit., p. 378.

[56]Ibid., p. 380.

them from speaking on a low moral level at times. This is witnessed in the descriptions of the enemies, and even more in the terrible curses upon them. "Here is hot emotion fired by the Semitic feeling that evil is self-destructive, that injustice comes back in retribution upon its perpetrator."[57] These execrations are proportioned to what the psalmist has experienced at the hands of the enemies.

V. PSALM EIGHTY-THREE

The Text of the Imprecations.

> Do thou unto them (the enemies) as unto Midian,
> As to Sisera, as to Jabin, at the river Kishon;
> Who perished at Endor,
> Who became as dung for the earth.
> Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb;
> Yea, all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna;
> . . .
> O my God, make them like the whirling dust;
> As stubble before the wind.
> As the fire that burneth the forest,
> And as the flame that setteth the mountains on fire,
> So pursue them with thy tempest,
> And terrify them with thy storm.
> Fill their faces with confusion,
> . . .
> Let them be confounded and perish;
> Let them be put to shame and dismayed forever;
> Yea, let them be confounded and perish:
> (vss. 9-16a, 17)

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[57] Ibid., p. 379.

The Hegelian Interpretation.

Oesterly. The Psalm is a national lament, composed for a time of peril to the national existence. There is no need to identify the individual psalmist, for he was clearly speaking in the corporate personality.

Likewise, there is no need to attempt to identify the incident for which this Psalm was composed. There is a strong possibility that verses 6-8 are a gloss, for they contribute nothing to the progress of the actual Psalm, and were likely added to adapt the Psalm to a later situation.[58] There have been many scholars who claim a Maccabean date, while others feel that Jehosophat's defense against his enemies fits the Psalm. Some would make Nehemiah the national psalmist, while there have been references to Artaxerxes Ochus. However, an attempt at exact dating can be little more than a precarious conjecture.[59]

A consideration of the imprecations yields more profitable result than an attempt to date the Psalm. The imprecations are divided into an indirect and a direct grouping. The indirect imprecation employs the recognized method of citing instances of former victories and wishing a corre-

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[58] Oesterly, op. cit., p. 376.

[59] Ibid.

sponding defeat upon the objects of the curse.[60] This emphasizes the magical power of the spoken word. The two victories cited are that of Deborah and Barak over Sisera and Jabin, and the later overthrow of the Midianites by Gideon. These indirect imprecations then turn to more direct cursing. These final maledictions are metaphors from the natural life about the psalmist. The psalmist then turns to the closing verses, which somewhat mitigate the severity of the imprecations.

The aim of the psalmist, according to these verses, is not the obliteration of the enemies, but their conversion. The purpose of all that happens to them is that they may know that the God of Israel alone is the Most High over all the earth.

Apart from these last verses, the Psalm is almost pure vindictiveness. The impression inescapable that this final paragraph is an afterthought, perhaps even a later addition, which was appended to modify the severity which offended the spiritual taste of the better minds of Israel.[61] Christian and later Jewish feeling could not endorse the sentiments without sacrificing principles. However, although approval cannot be given, understanding is not impossible.

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[60] Ibid., p. 377.

[61] Ibid., p. 378.

Ewald. This poem would fall, according to signs, in Nehemiah's time.[62] The nations which would hinder or destroy the new Jerusalem as it was rising with new power, although there are older names included in the list of enemies, such as Amalek of Assyria, these stand as symbolic of ancient foes.[63]

The morality of the imprecations receives no notice from Ewald. The Hegelian position on this must stand on Oesterly's interpretation.

The Form-Critic Interpretation.

Buttenweiser. This Psalm is a community lament at the time of the league of small nations against Judah. Although this is generally held to be from the time of Simon and Judas Maccabeus, it actually differs much in both situations and tone from the Maccabean record.[64] The picture of the existing conditions actually link the Psalm with Psalms 18 and 35, which also tell of the threat posed to the existof the nation by an attacking people.[65]

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[62]Ewald, op. cit., p. 378.

[63]Ibid., p. 254.

[64]Buttenweiser, op. cit., p. 472.

[65]Ibid., pp. 472-473.

The similarity between the Psalms ends in the description of the situation, however. Psalm 83, in sharp contrast to the others, is a hymn of hate, and spiritually valueless.

> Its author is moved neither by nobility of soul nor by any other lofty religious outlook. He is a zealot of Ezekiel's type, wishing like him that for their wanton attack on his land, God wipe out the enemies root and branch so as to make them realize might. The lack of all sense of humor which this wish betrays is characteristic of fanatics.[66]

Internal evidence, such as the use of "Assyria" points to the early Persian period, for that was also a name given to the Persian empire.[67]

Leslie. Psalm 83 is a national lament which dates from the period between Nehemiah and Alexander the Great. This would then place it roughly between 444 B. C. and 331 B. C.[68] It was used in the liturgical services as a song for the choir.[69]

The lament of the worshippers poured out by the choir tells of a might and crafty alliance of small nations who hated the people of the Lord. They are the enemies of both

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[66] Ibid., p. 473.

[67] Ibid., p. 474.

[68] Leslie, op. cit., p. 247.

[69] Ibid.

God's people and God himself.

From lament the Psalm moves into solemn petition, and the psalmist wishes in passionate longing that a curse may fall upon those nations and tribes seeking Israel's harm. Here is an example of sympathetic magic, for the name of the former victim is recited, and the fate which he suffered. It is felt that by thus bringing the accursed one in contact with the names of famous curse-laden individuals and nations of the past, he will become infected with just such a curse as destroyed them.[70] The psalmist then goes even further, and employs vivid pictures from nature in the plea for the shaming of the heathen.

However, it must be realistically admitted that the ultimate aim of the curse upon these enemies is the exaltation of the Lord as sole God of the earth.[71] The prayer is that these enemies who are so bent on dispossessing the Lord's people may come to feel such shame and remorse as will lead them to seek peace with God and be forgiven.[72]

VI. PSALM ONE HUNDRED NINE

Text of the Imprecations.

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[70] Ibid., p. 249.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid.

Set thou a wicked man over him;
And let an adversary stand at his right hand.
When he is judged, let him come forth guilty;
And let his prayer be turned into sin.
Let his days be few;
And let another take his office.
Let his children be fatherless,
And his wife a widow.
Let his children be vagabonds, and beg;
And let them seek their bread out of their
desolate places.
Let the extortioner catch all that he hath;
And let strangers make spoil of his labor.
Let there be none to extend kindness unto him;
Neither let there be any to have pity on his
fatherless children.
Let his posterity be cut off;
In the generation following let their name be
blotted out.
Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered
with Jehovah;
And let not the sin of his mother be blotted out.
Let them be before Jehovah continually,
That he may cut off the memory of them from the
earth;
Because he remembered not to show kindness,
But persecuted the poor and needy man,
And the broken in heart, to slay them.
Yea, he loved cursing, and it came unto him;
And he delighted not in blessing, and it was far
from him.
He clothed himself also with cursing as with his
garment,
And it came into his inward parts like water,
And like oil into his bones.
Let it be unto him as the raiment wherewith he
covereth himself,
And for the girdle wherewith he is girded con-
tinually.
This is the reward of mine adversaries from
Jehovah,
And of them that speak evil against my soul.
(vss. 5-20)

The Hegelian Interpretation.

Oesterly. The picture here is that of a court scene,

and consists almost solely of imprecations. The judge is a wicked man, and an accuser or adversary stands at the right hand of the enemy. The Hebrew word, satan, adapted in the New Testament as the personal Devil, is never used as a proper name in the Old Testament.[73] The entire imprecation which seems to deal with the family of the enemy does not express ill-will against them as persons, but is an expression of the desire for the death of the enemy.[74] The words of verse eight are quoted in Acts 1:20, in application to Judas Iscariot, and hence this Psalm became known as the Psalmus Iscariotus in the early Church.[75] The retribution of God upon the enemy is to be those things which he did to the psalmist (vss. 16-20).

Although God is recognized as the One who will bring the retribution to pass, this Psalm belongs to magical texts rather than to religious literature.[76] These imprecations are uttered by the psalmist himself, and cannot be attributed to a recitation of the curses of the enemy against the psalmist.[77] The only extenuation which may be advanced for these

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[73] Oesterly, op. cit., p. 459.

[74] Ibid., p. 460.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid., p. 457.

[77] Ibid.

terrible sentiments is the fact that the psalmist felt that his enemies were the enemies of the righteous and of God. However, the intense personal nature of this Psalm greatly predominates, and therefore destroys to a large degree the validity of the extenuation.[78] It was early recognized that this Psalm was unfit for use in worship, and was used by the mediaeval Jews as a sovereign remedy against the machinations of an enemy.[79]

Ewald. This Psalm may well be written by the psalmist of Psalm 69, for it proceeds in the same gloomy and serious vein. This is presumably because a fresh severe persecution and calumny have been added. It is certain, whoever the psalmist may be, that this Psalm was written during the dispersion, under severe and dangerous conditions.[80]

From the beginning of the imprecation, it is clearly inferred that the poet was innocently condemned by a heathen prince through the influence of an opponent and accuser.[81] Much of the imprecation, verses 8, 14, and 15, seem to deal

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[78] Ibid., p. 458.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ewald, op. cit., p. 72.

[81] Ibid., p. 76.

with that which has happened to the poet.[82] Verses 17-19 are imprecations hurled by the poet against an outstanding foe, and ask that the evil of the foe be returned upon his own head.

These imprecations are the result of a bitter calumny which a religious associate in exile has worked.[83] The more highly piety in the religion of Jehovah was esteemed at that time, the more the false charges of the perfidious wicked worked injury. So the poet presents a picture of a man who is deeply trustful of God, but at the same time feels so deeply wronged that he is impelled to thrust forth the strongest and longest imprecation found in the Psalms.[84]

The Form-Critic Interpretation.

Buttenweiser. While this Psalm has been made the object of both much adverse comment and charitable apology for the bitter imprecations contained therein, this has been unnecessary. Neither has it been necessary for the forced and strained interpretation which would make the imprecations the utterances of the enemy against the psalmist.[85] The so-

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[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid., p. 73.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Buttenweiser, op. cit., p. 740.

lution of this moral difficulty is simple, for "it is certain beyond doubt that verses 6-19 cannot originally have been a component part of verses 1-5, 20-31."[86] These imprecations are an organic whole, and are in an entirely different spirit than the other verses. Therefore, verses 1-5, 20-31 must be designated as Psalm 109A, while verses 6-19 are regarded as 109B.[87]

Psalm 109A is an outstandingly spiritual prayer of surpassing beauty. The attack of the enemy upon his nation has caused him to pray, in the corporate sense, for the salvation of his people. This prayer is in language strikingly similar to the sentiment and phraseology of Psalm 69. The use of rare words and thoughts shows that this Psalm, if not written by the same poet as Psalm 69, was at least written at the same time.[88]

Psalm 109B is simply a curse from a bitter man. The original beginning of the curse has been lost, but it is not needed to judge the quality of this piece of literature. There need be only one more comment upon 109B--it should be deleted from the Psalter.[89]

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[86] Ibid., p. 741.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid., p. 743.

[89] Ibid., p. 747.

Leslie. This Psalm arises from a heart full of sorrow and heaviness. The psalmist has come to the sanctuary to pray about the groundless accusations which are being hurled at him by the evil men who attack him. However, the psalmist's soul is too heavy to pray at first, so he relieves his pent-up emotions by a recitation of the charges brought against him by his enemies.

Schmidt has clearly shown that verses 6-19 are not a part of the psalmist's prayer, but a recitation of the charges which have been preferred against him.[90] He is accused of many evil deeds, not the least of which is black magic which was the means used to bring the death of a poor and needy man who had heart trouble (vs. 7).[91] The recitation of the curses of the psalmist's accusers comes to an end with verse 19, and he calls down upon them the very curses which they would bind upon him (vs. 20).[92]

Having relieved his soul of the tensions and sorrows which made it so heavy within him, the righteous psalmist ends his petition upon a vow of thanksgiving based upon his confidence that the Lord will rescue him in his crisis.

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[90]Leslie, op. cit., p. 388.

[91]Ibid., p. 389.

[92]Ibid., p. 390.

VII. PSALM ONE HUNDRED THIRTY-SEVEN

Text of the Imprecations.

> Remember, O Jehovah, against the children of
> Edom
> The day of Jerusalem;
> Who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the founda-
> tion thereof.
> O daughter of Babylon, that art to be destroyed,
> Happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee
> As thou hast served us.
> Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy
> little ones
> Against the rock.
> (vss. 7-9)

The Hegelian Interpretation.

Oesterly. The scene is in the city of Jerusalem, soon after the return of the exiles. Here the psalmist, surrounded by a group of acquaintances who had stayed in Jerusalem, tells of some of his experiences at Babylon. One of these experiences involved the desire of the captors to hear some more singing by the Jews, not realizing that these were songs of Jehovah.

The vital religious fervor of this returned Jew is seen in his curse which he called down upon himself (vss. 5, 6), if he should fail in his observance of the things of God. His indignation that these impudent captors did not realize that Jerusalem was the place to worship Jehovah was unbounded. It would be a violation of the sanctity of God's dwelling

place.[93]

This indignation, which is once more aroused, is now turned against the Edomites, who had helped spoil Jerusalem. He asks God to remember to visit them in the day of punishment for the spoiling of his people.[94] Reverting back to his major theme, the psalmist now says that happy, in the sense of blessed by Jehovah, was the one who slaughtered the little ones of Babylon.

This is comprehensible, for the psalmist identified this destroyer of Babylon as the destroyer of God's enemy. While this concept may be understood, it may never be condoned. The best which may be said of it is that it reveals a yielding to human passions. There is a real contrast between the devotion to God's Temple and the outrage in the name of religious blessing which is praised. Even the lex talionis was not intended to be carried this far.[95] The dominant note of the Psalm, however, is truly religious, telling of the faith and loyalty of those who had lost their place of worship, but stayed true to God in the midst of the temptations of a foreign land.

Ewald. The psalmist here exclaims in the thrill of

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[93] Oesterly, op. cit., p. 547.

[94] Ibid., p. 548.

[95] Ibid., pp. 548-549.

fresh release and return from exile. There is mixed feeling in this Psalm, alternating from a thrill at seeing Jerusalem for the first time since the captivity, and the still bitter resentment at the mocking requests of the Babylonians that the Jews praise their God.[96]

The resentment conquers the religious feeling momentarily, and the psalmist seeks God's revenge upon the enemies which had done these terrible things. Since the city of Babylon was destroyed by Darius in 516, and the psalmist refers to the coming destruction of Babylon, this Psalm must be dated before 516 B. C.[97] The practice of infanticide was the practice among victorious peoples of the day, and this is the origin of the wish in verse nine.[98]

The Form-Critic Interpretation.

Buttenweiser. This Psalm comes from the heart of conquering Babylon, where the exiled Jews daily suffered mockery at their religion. "Daughter of Babylon" is a reference to the entire dominion of Babylon, not merely the capital. Since verse nine thus clearly shows that Babylon had not fallen as a power to Persia, it must be admitted that this Psalm is a

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[96]Ewald, op. cit., p. 173.

[97]Ibid., p. 174.

[98]Ibid., p. 176.

product of the exile, not the restoration.[99]

It is a priceless document for the understanding of the exilic attitudes, dramatically portraying an utter hopelessness which is true to life. It tallies with what Ezekiel tells of the reaction of the Jews to the destruction of the nation:

> Verily, like these bones
> Is the whole house of Israel:
> They say, Our bones are dry, our hope is lost,
> We are ruined--(Ezekiel 37:11)[100]

that is, spiritually as well as materially. Instances of this despair may be multiplied, but this is sufficient to show the mood of the psalmist at the thought of the destruction of Jerusalem, the center of religion and home of Jehovah.

The Jews would not have thought it a profanation to sing the songs of Jehovah in Babylon, but would rather have thought it to be a mockery, for the world of belief embodied in these songs had ceased to exist, even as had their country.[101] Ruined and despondent, their only hope was that of revenge equal to that destruction meted upon them.

These imprecations must be viewed in this light. They come from a despondent people who were living in the possibility that they might see these things occur.

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[99] Buttenweiser, op. cit., p. 217.

[100] Ibid., p. 219.

[101] Ibid., p. 220.

Leslie. From the Diaspora, somewhere between Babylon and Jerusalem, comes this congregational lament.[102] It was created for the celebration of the fast of the ninth of Ab, recalling, according to Rabbinic tradition, the destruction of the Temple at the fall of Jerusalem.[103]

Opening with a poetic narrative of an episode which took place in Babylon, where the defiling captors demanded that a song of Zion be sung, the poem moves into a deep lament. For a Jew to sing a Zion song in the land of his irreverent captors, for their coarse amusement, was to commit sacrilege. Thus, the psalmist calls down upon himself an imprecation in honor of Jerusalem. This then becomes a common feature of congregational laments, a wish for revenge.

Treacherous Edom first falls under that curse, closely followed by Babylon. Grief is followed by revenge, which is then followed by hate. The temper of these words is far below the love of Christ, and shows how far the religion of a pious Jew permitted him to go in his feelings. There are three forms which the imprecations of verses 5-9 takes. The first (5-6) is a conditional wish, the second (7) a petition to the Lord, and the third (8-9) the blessing of that nation

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[102]Leslie, op. cit., p. 256.

[103]Ibid.

which will destroy the Chaldeans.[104]

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

The Hegelian Conclusions.

The Psalms are generally to be dated in the early Maccabean period. It is admitted, however, that there are very often difficulties in the Psalms themselves which make an exact assignment almost impossible. The two greatest difficulties in dating lie in the textual corruption and the vague or general references to place or situation. While emendations are controversial, it is felt that they are often unavoidable, for the present form does not show the genuine Psalm. Where there are references to such theological concepts as monotheism, it becomes plain that a gloss has been added to an earlier piece of religious poetry.

The work of the glossator, or redactor, is further seen in the alteration of the Psalms to fit corporate worship patterns. The individual character and tone of these Psalms causes one to believe that they were written by an individual, speaking his complaint personally to God. While the majority of these Psalms were written by the individual, it is neither possible nor profitable to assign authorship, as does the traditional psalter. The corruption of the individual lament

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[104] Ibid., p. 258.

for the ritual precludes this possibility.

While much effort has been made at refinement of these Psalms for the ritual, many crude concepts are still apparent. Outstanding among these surviving beliefs is the belief in the power of the spoken word. While it is seen that the Hebrew religion had developed to the place where God was credited with empowering the spoken word, many of these imprecations must be regarded as magical formulae. Other of these Psalms show traces of a legal procedure in which God is called upon to act as a Judge. The imprecations in these Psalms are especially valuable in determining the stage of religious development which had been reached in the Hebrew religion. While the morality of the imprecation is unacceptable, it may be understood as a product of the times, and judged accordingly. Through interpreting the concepts of these Psalms, it is possible to fit them into the evolutionary framework as proposed in the Hegelian view of history.

The Form-Critic Conclusions.

These Psalms, as does the remainder of the Psalter, show the heavy hand of the editor. Because these Psalms have been edited so extensively, it is necessary to rearrange the verse structure, that the original meaning of the poetry may be understood.

This poetry cannot be assigned any specific date, for

the extensive editing and the necessity of rearrangement makes this an impossible task. Any assignment of historical occasion is quite arbitrary and fanciful. The text of the Psalms gives no support to such an assignment.

However, this does not preclude the possibility of making general assignments, especially within broad periods. Here, the content and message of the Psalms makes it possible, if an adequate consideration of form and concept is employed.

In interpreting the imprecations of these Psalms, it is seen that the development of the religious concepts demands, in the main, assignment to the early post-exilic years. However, there are a number of imprecations which are fragments from other laments of an earlier period. All these imprecations must be considered in the light of the morality of the times, and the frailities of human nature. It is hard to determine the time in which these fragmentary laments were written because there is little historical reference in these Psalms.

The pronounced lack of direct historical reference in the Psalter may seem strange to those studying the Psalms, but it need not surprise one if it is borne in mind that the hymnbook has been purged and cleansed of all personal references. While it is obvious that these Psalms are extremely personal in appeal, two factors must be recognized before correct interpretation is made possible. First, most of the

psalmists were speaking in the sense of the corporate personality, voicing the lament of the community. Secondly, the above-mentioned editing had divested them of any truly personal reference.

Precisely for this reason, a new approach as embodied in the Form-Critic study, must be made to these and other Psalms. It must be recognized that these songs originate in the religious cult and are associated with the worship of the community. Any classification and interpretation must proceed from this frame of reference.[105]

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[105]John Paterson, The Praises of Israel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 29.

CHAPTER V

THE EVANGELICAL INTERPRETATION

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the interpretations of representative Evangelical scholars. Special emphasis has been placed upon the morality of the Psalms, the underlying causes of this morality, and the effect of this morality upon the traditional interpretation of the Scriptures.

It will be noted that this has been done by a different procedure than was employed in chapter four. Here, the interpretations of the Evangelical scholars were so closely parallel that it was felt that a better view of their position could be given by combining rather than contrasting their findings. This is not to say that there is solid unanimity of opinion within the Evangelical school of thought. Rather, the differences of opinion have been incorporated into the body of the exegesis because there are no formally defined Evangelical differences as in the case of the Liberal Hegelians and Form-Critics.

In this study of the Evangelical interpretations, there were observed certain general trends. Therefore, there has been an analysis of these trends that representative conclusions might be formulated. The differences within the Evangelical position have thus been more clearly defined.

I. AN EVANGELICAL EXEGESIS

Psalm Thirty-five.

In this Psalm, David prays deliverance from enemies. On the surface, the terrible imprecations found here are entirely within the realm of the unethical. "Let them be put to shame and brought to dishonour that seek after my soul: Let them be turned back and confounded that devise my hurt" (vss. 4, 5). "Let their way be darkness and slippery places, and the angel of Jehovah pursuing them" (vs. 6). "Let them be put to shame and confounded together that rejoice at my hurt: Let them be clothed with shame and dishonour that magnify themselves against me" (vs. 26). These imprecations are fierce and terrible. However, closer study of this Psalm brings out the fact that there is good reason for David's prayer. These men are evil, wicked and ungrateful. They would cause David to fall without cause. "For without cause have they digged a pit for my soul. For without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit" (vs. 7). "They reward me evil for good, to the bereaving of my soul. But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I afflicted my soul with fasting. . .I behaved myself as though it had been my friend or brother" (vss. 12-14). Thus, these evil doers had forfeited David's friendship. This was not the only reason that David prayed for destruction

upon the enemies who surrounded him. David was the evident champion of right, as represented here, and his enemies were the exponents of evil. For this reason, God was implored to intervene in David's just behalf, that it might prove to be an example to those who observed the struggle. "Let them shout for joy, and be glad, that favor my righteous cause: Yea, let them say continually, Jehovah be magnified, Who hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servant" (vs. 27). The vindication of David's cause and the destruction of his enemies was not desired for selfish grounds, but that the cause of righteousness might be forwarded, and that God's people might see that right truly does triumph over evil. "And my tongue shall talk of thy righteousness and of thy praise all the day long" (vs. 28). David's praise would mount up that God's cause had been vindicated, not that his personal enemies had been destroyed.

Psalm Fifty-five.

David once again is beset by enemies. To properly understand this Psalm, the background must be considered. "According to tradition, the Psalm is connected with Absalom's rebellion, and the 'familiar friend' in verse 14 is named Ahitophel in the Targum and Ethics of the Fathers."[1] This

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[1] A. Cohen, The Psalms (London, England: Soncino Press, 1950), p. 172.

is a prayer of a man who has been betrayed by base treachery, and the result is a bitter plea to God for His deliverance. The key denunciation may be found in verses ten through sixteen. The iniquity of those who have betrayed David is constant, and their mischief is found in the city both day and night (vs. 10). The whole city writhes in the grip of wickedness, and guile and oppression issue from the very streets (vs. 10). This is the evil done by those who have subverted the righteous rule of David. However, the most tragic outcry is found in verses twelve through fifteen. Here the full burden of David's broken heart is laid bare.

> For it was not an enemy that reproached me;
> Then I could have borne it:
> Neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me:
> Then I would have hid myself from him:
> But it was thou, a man mine equal,
> My companion, and my familiar friend,
> We took sweet counsel together;
> We walked in the house of God with the throng.

David's betrayer was a man who had the closest personal communion with him, and had given every evidence of true friendship. David had received his counsel, and had counted it as sweet. This man had been considered as David's equal, and had worshipped God with the King. Then came the unexpected betrayal, by this man, and as tradition gives it, in league with David's dearest son, Absalom.

It is no wonder that David cried out to God in bitterness of soul for the destruction of such perverse men. "Let

death come suddenly upon them, let them go down alive into Sheol: for wickedness is in their dwelling, in midst of them" (vs. 15). This terrible punishment which is requested is in just recompense for their wickedness. David realized that these men had no good in them, as is made more clear in the marginal translation of verse 15b, "For wickedness is in their dwelling, in their inward part." Nevertheless, David is content to allow the Lord to destroy the wicked, and to remain in a state of trust and rest in the Lord. "As for me, I will call upon God, and Jehovah will save me" (vs. 16). In the midst of this spiritual battle over the problem of evil within the world, David rises to new and greater spiritual heights. Even in the renewed recrimination against his treacherous friend, verses twenty and twenty-one, David suddenly halts and cries out his trust in God, despite the present evil which he finds in his life.

> Cast thy burden upon Jehovah, and He will sustain you:
> He will never suffer the righteous to be moved.
> But thou, O God, wilt bring them down into the pit of destruction:
> Bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days;
> But I will trust in thee. (vss. 22, 23)

Although there is much prayer for the destruction of the wicked, nowhere in this Psalm is there a hint that David desires this destruction to be given into his hands. If tradition is correct in making the occasion of Absalom's

rebellion the subject of this Psalm, David's purity of motive may be seen even more clearly. David desired that no harm befall his rebellious son, even though much suffering had been caused by Absalom's sin. Despite the seemingly terrible imprecations, David's motives in this Psalm, and in his later actions, are in complete harmony with the principle found in both the Old and the New Testaments, "Vengeance is Mine, I will recompense, saith the Lord." David shows the same spirit of trust in God's eventual destruction of the wicked in this Psalm as he does in his other Psalms.

Psalm Fifty-nine.

On this occasion, Saul had sent watchers to guard the house of David that they might kill him at the first opportunity. David appeals to God to save him from the wicked and is confident that he is innocent. His innocence is appealed to as proof that God will hear and answer his prayer. "Deliver me from the workers of iniquity, and save me from the bloodthirsty men. . .They run and prepare themselves without my fault" (vss. 2, 4). David's enemies say that God will not hear the prayers of a righteous man. "For who, say they, doth hear?" These practical atheists are guilty of cursing and lying, evidently having falsely vilified David to someone, probably King Saul (vs. 12). David asks that these sinners be punished for their cursing and lying, and

that their pride may be the means of their downfall (vs. 12). This prayer of David's does not ask that they be utterly destroyed without possibility of life, but that their power be removed. The destruction of their power is not sought for personal motives, but to "Let them know that God ruleth in Jacob, unto the ends of the earth" (vs. 13). Not only is their destruction to teach these evil-doers a lesson, but it is to act as an example to the ones who watch this struggle between right and wrong. "Slay them not, lest my people forget: Scatter them by Thy power, and bring them down, O Lord our shield." (vs. 14) David has not asked that his enemies be preserved alive that they might suffer a lingering, cruel punishment for their sins. This retribution is removed from the realm of the personal in the prayer of David. If it had been a personal desire for a lingering death for his enemies' persons, there would have been grounds for criticism of this Psalm. But on the contrary, David asks that God use the destruction of his enemies to teach the people that there is danger in pride and sin, and that God truly does hear and answer the prayers of a righteous man. David is content to let God work the problem out in His own way, and in His own time. As for David, he is going to praise God.

> But I will sing of Thy strength:
> Yea, I will sing aloud of thy lovingkindness
> in the morning:
> For Thou hast been my high tower, and a refuge
> in the day of my distress.

> Unto thee, O my strength, will I sing praises:
> For God is my high tower, the God of my mercy.
> (vss. 16, 17)

On this high spiritual note, this Psalm ends. When viewed in the proper light, the imprecations found in this Psalm are not ethically difficult.

Psalm Sixty-nine.

The ethical implications of this Psalm must be also understood in the proper perspective. This Psalm is traditionally ascribed to David, although it is claimed by some to have been written by Jeremiah.[2] The critical assignment of authorship is not important to the discussion of the contents of the Psalm, however. The author is in great trouble, as is related in verses one through three. The persecutions of his human enemies is without cause, but they are many and powerful. The object of these enemies is to completely destroy the author. Evidently the enemies are in positions of authority, and are abusing that power. "That which I took not away I have to restore" (vs. 4). The author admits that he has been at fault, and is not sinless, but demands that God punish him, and that these enemies be stricken for presuming upon God's prerogative. Truly the imprecations found in the passage of verses twenty-two through twenty-eight are

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[2] Ibid., p. 219.

fierce, but are the product of deep personal anguish, compounded by his reproach from God and the unjust treatment at the hands of the persecutors, as described in verses seventeen through twenty-one. Two reasons are given by the psalmist for the destruction of his enemies. "For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten; and they tell of the pain of those whom thou hast wounded." (vs. 26) In this first condemnation, the psalmist tells of the malice that is wrought upon the one whom God was chastening, and claims that these evil ones are boasting that God had given them the power to inflict pain upon him. The second condemnation concerns the familiar plea that the success of the evil ones will discourage the righteous.

> Let not them that wait for thee be put to shame through me, O Lord Jehovah of hosts:
> Let not those that seek thee be brought to dishonour through me, O God of Israel.
> Because for thy sake I have borne reproach;
> Shame hath covered my face. (vss. 6, 7)

Then David is filled with the joy of the Lord, and speaking in the prophetic future, tells of the immanent triumph of righteousness over evil. "The meek have seen it, and are glad; Ye that seek after God, let your heart live. For Jehovah heareth the needy, and despiseth not His prisoners" (vss. 32, 33). Despite the terrible imprecations, which lose their fierceness to a great degree when viewed in the light of the great struggle between right and evil as de-

picted here, this psalmist is able to end his prayer on a high note of hopeful praise.

Psalm Eighty-three.

Israel is faced with a coalition of deadly and ancient foes. The cause for the call of Jehovah is seen in the first two verses. God is called to arise, and not to hold His peace, for His enemies make a tumult and those that hate Him are bestirring themselves to cause evil. The attack upon Israel is incidental in the view of the psalmist, for he sees that these heathen nations have consented with one accord to make a covenant against God (vss. 4, 5). The first group of imprecations is found in verses nine through twelve, when past victories of God over Israel's foes are recalled to memory. The call is to do unto these rebels even as was done unto those who in the past said, "Let us take to ourselves in possession the habitation of God" (vs. 12). The second group of imprecations found in this Psalm is seen in verses thirteen through eighteen. Here the simile of destruction is the forces of God in nature, and this destruction is called down upon the heads of the enemies for a very definite purpose. There is nothing personally vengeful in the language of the psalmist when he asks that God pursue them with the tempest, and terrify them with His storm, and to fill their faces with confusion (vss. 15, 16). The remainder of verse

sixteen is vital to understanding the purpose of the psalmist in calling for God's destructive power: "That they might seek Thy name, O Jehovah." This attack by the pitiless strong is an attack on God's people and a rebellion against the moral kingship of God in the world. For this reason, the psalmist says in verses seventeen and eighteen, that if the people will not repent from their evil, and will not learn from the humiliation which God will bring about, then they must perish and be confounded. Only in this way will the people know that those who rebel against God's moral authority in the world will receive swift retribution. It is the struggle of old between righteousness and evil, with the lesson of the eventual triumph of right which must be taught once more.

Psalm One Hundred and Nine.

The first five verses of this Psalm are clearly the psalmist in communion with God, telling of the difference in morality and righteousness between his adversaries and himself. Therefore, the psalmist has called upon God to "hold not thy peace," as found in verse one. Although the first five verses are clear in their authorship, verses sixteen through twenty are open to various interpretations. One interpretation holds that the psalmist is the one uttering his imprecations against the adversaries. The other, and

seemingly more plausible interpretation, holds that these imprecations come from the lips of the ones who are the unjust adversaries. Verse five is clearly the psalmist speaking of his enemies, using the plural pronoun. However, all through the next fifteen verses, or the section of imprecations, the singular pronoun is used. Thus, it would seem obvious that the psalmist is reciting the list of accusations against him, and then going on in the twenty-first verse forward, asking that Jehovah help him. If one interprets the imprecations as coming from the psalmist, one is faced with the task of providing an explanation for the use of the singular pronoun. This may be done by pointing out the possible use of the pronoun in the collective or the distributive sense. The imprecations used by the psalmist are mild in comparison to those used by his enemies, and they are not for his own glory. The judgment of Jehovah is sought that the evil might be put to shame, and that the true servant of God might rejoice at the sight of the salvation which comes from the God who stands at the "right hand of the needy, to save him from them that judge his soul" (vs. 31).

Whichever of the two interpretations is taken, these imprecations may be satisfactorily explained. If it is the imprecations of the wicked against the unjustly accused righteous, these are to be expected from those who hate the way of God and all who follow in them. On the other hand,

if the righteous psalmist is the one who gives vent to his wrath, this wrath is declared against the evil of his enemies. The psalmist is not presuming to declare that the enemies are wicked, but asks God to judge between his enemies and himself. "But deal Thou with me, O Jehovah the Lord, for Thy name's sake" (vs. 21). The name of God signifies His nature, so therefore, justice will naturally come forth as a manifestation of the righteous God. The list of sins which the wicked had committed, if the wicked enemies are the object of the imprecations, are good grounds for their destruction. To the psalmist in this passage, the evil must have been seen to be an integral part of his enemies' nature, and therefore, God in righteousness will deal with the evil ones. Once again, the wrath is not against the evil ones, per se, but against the evil of their nature and actions. In a comparison between himself and the enemies, the author is willing to trust to the Lord, and will lean upon Him. The mercy of the Lord is invoked, for the psalmist is weak and needy, and the Lord is His one hope.

Thus, whichever of these two interpretations of the imprecations of this Psalm is preferred, the contrast between good and evil, and the hope of the righteous in the Lord, is the dominant theme. Although this author prefers to interpret the Psalm as a type of supplication in which the just grievances are listed, and the wicked accusations

of the evil ones recited to God, the major item of importance in both of these interpretations is the love toward God and the trust in His righteousness and mercy.

Psalm One Hundred and Thirty-seven.

The situation of this Psalm is all important to a correct understanding of the emotions of the psalmist. The writer of this Psalm is evidently an exile, recently returned from Babylon, and is expressing his feelings of horror upon his first sight of the beloved city, Jerusalem. To the Jew, Jerusalem was the center of the national and religious life. Upon seeing the havoc which had been wrought, the psalmist doubtless felt a sense of total loss, initially, of national existence, but primarily, the loss of his religious life. The temple had been demolished, and all the worship had ceased. There was no hope on the surface of things, and bitterness filled his heart.

In the bitterness of the sorrow of his soul, the psalmist turns to God and calls out, "Remember, O Lord, against the Children of Edom." These Children of Edom were kin to the Israelites, and yet as the prophet Amos had said, they were even as one with the Babylonians in the destruction of Jerusalem. In their hatred and cruelty, kinship was given no place and for this reason, the Lord must punish them. The psalmist then turned to the Lord and asked Him to destroy

the perpetrator of this ruin of his beloved city. If the eighth verse were to be put into modern parlance and thought, it probably would read, "Babylon, you are going to be destroyed, and anything that you receive at the hand of your destroyer will be in payment for the treatment which you gave to Israel. Any treatment you receive will be in payment for your cruelty and destructiveness at the fall of Jerusalem." The ninth verse is the most difficult of all to explain. However, if it is possible to put oneself in the place of the mourning psalmist, and thus to establish a sympathetic relationship, an understanding might be achieved. The imprecation is a terrible one, and there can be no denial of that fact. However, the murder of infants was a common practice in the warfare of that day, and the Babylonians were guilty of that monstrosity in the pillage of Jerusalem. Therefore, even as the psalmist had seen the future hope of his nation slaughtered, so he rejoiced in the anticipation of the removal of the Babylonian race. It is not a pretty picture which is drawn, but war is not pretty. There is nothing beautiful about evil in its resolved form, and force must be used to overcome entrenched evil. Although God is a God of love, He is also a God of wrath, sure and holy. To limit God to love is to destroy the moral rule of the universe. These Babylonians had been used by God to purge His people, but they had far exceeded

in cruelty and ruthless hatred the bound which God had set. This was to be their punishment. As a man who lived in times in which God had not fully revealed Himself through the Incarnate Word, the psalmist doubtless expressed himself in harsh and hasty words. The question still stands to challenge the smug religious culture of the West, "What would you do in the psalmist's situation?" The "Christian" West may not express themselves in harsh words, but the actions are often more deplorable than these words. Those who have suffered greatly and lost much are not quick to condemn other sufferers in their grief.

II. EVANGELICAL CONCLUSIONS

These are the most important of the Imprecatory Psalms. Although there are other Psalms which generally come under this title, they are excluded from consideration in this study through lack of space. Their importance is minor, for the type is well-represented in the major imprecatory Psalms already examined.

In the above consideration of these Psalms, certain facts stand out in bold relief, through the very consistency and frequency with which they are to be found in the various Psalms. A study of the Imprecatory Psalms would be incomplete without a correlation of these facts into some broad principles.

Despite the terrific denunciation of the enemies, there is no indication that the Psalmist would have actually carried out his threats. It is not at all certain that the writers would have wreaked vengeance. This is the first principle to be observed when interpreting these Psalms. The two fiercest of these Psalms are ascribed to David. The one ascribing them to David saw no difference between David's action in writing these Psalms, and the manifest mercy which David showed when he had his worst enemy in his power.[3] At one of the most critical times of his life, David spared Saul, his enemy, when it was entirely in his power to kill him. Despite the mercy shown to him, Saul perservered in his attempts to kill David. And, at a time similiar to the first, David spared Saul once again. David was a man who could express himself in loud words of harsh denunciation, but when the time came for enacting these words his basic sense of mercy and morality prevented him from killing. In other cases, bitter denunciation was followed by actual mercy. David forbore to take the life of the worthless Shimei, and although he was under no obligation to spare the life of Ishbosheth, he was willing to do so. In fact, his mercy to his enemies extended to punishing by death

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[3]Rollin H. Walker, The Modern Message of the Psalms (Cincinnati, Ohio: Abingdon Press, 1936), p. 184.

those who tried to curry favor by the killing of the natural enemies of the Davidic throne.[4] The very nature of these men, followers of the living God, would prevent them from carrying out their imprecations. It is only in the most exagerated sense of the word that these imprecations could be called words of hatred. And from the other Psalms, one could hardly imagine these men in the act of carrying out their prayer for the dashing of Babylonian babies against the rock, much less glorying in the feat.[5] The very use of the highly colored poetry employed in these Psalms leads one to the conclusion that there was a fundamental difference in the language used by the Orientals and the language used by modern Occidentals.

The ancient Orientals did not use abstractions in their poetry. They saw nothing wicked in being completely frank, as witnessed in the Song of Solomon. When they saw evil in the world, they cried out against evil in concrete terms. Modern westerners do not indulge in such concrete terms, but are prone to talk and pray in general abstractions. This fundamental difference in the mode of expression is the second principle to be used in the interpretation of these

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[4]F. G. Hibbard, The Psalms (New York, New York: Carleton and Porter, 1856), p. 112.

[5]A. S. Rappoport, The Psalms (London, England: Manchester Press, 1953), p. 47.

Psalms. If westerners were to actually think through the consequences of the abstract prayers which they offer to God, there would be less unthinking prayer. Two examples of prayer will show this to be true. It is generally conceded that the liquor traffic is evil. Therefore, the prayer from most church members is this, "Lord, destroy the liquor traffic." The one praying does not stop to think that the answer to his prayer might well involve hardship to the families of those engaged in this evil commerce. He overlooks the fact that destruction of the liquor business would mean the loss of millions of dollars of invested capital, from the wealthy distiller to the independent owner of the corner tavern. The thought of the various hardships does not enter into this prayer. The concern is that evil, in an abstract form, and while one would not think of praying that the families of the tavern owner would be forced to endure much hardship, and be reduced to possible poverty, this is the long range implication of the destruction of this abstract evil. A second prayer for the destruction of what is altogether too abstract an evil takes this form, "Lord, destroy the Russians." This prayer is also often glibly repeated, without thought of the possible ensuing loss of life, broken homes and hearts, bloodshed, misery and disease which follow in the wake of war. If there were a better understanding of the fact that these men were praying in concrete form what is merely im-

plied in abstract modern prayers, the imprecatory Psalms would be interpreted more correctly.

The West has never experienced the terrible suffering which caused the psalmists to cry out in this definite language against their evil enemies. It is generally impossible for the Westener to enter into the delirious cry for justice which is expressed in these Psalms, for he has never felt the direct power of evil in his own personal life. These Psalms all come from the depths of personal anguish. In the interpretation of these Psalms, this third principle must never be forgotten. The story is told of a missionary to the Armenian peoples who was caught up in the time of the great Turkish massacres. Although forced to be careful in his attention to the Armenians, for fear of his very life, he did all in his power to alleviate their suffering. At this time of great national and individual suffering, the missionary was able to enter somewhat into the actual sufferings of his flock. One day, he saw a group of Kurdish tribesmen galloping through the town, fresh from a bloody slaughter. Slung across the pommel of the saddle of one of the tribesmen was the naked body of a little girl of about eight years of age. Shocked by this brutality, the missionary turned down a side street to escape the terrible scene. Later in the day, he saw the body of that little girl hanging on the sharp meat-hooks outside the butcher shop, with

the crude sign on her body, "fresh meat for sale." That night he wrote home to one of his friends, relating the incident, and ending with the plea, "Don't be too hasty in judgment of the Imprecatory Psalms."[6] It was in a time of great suffering that this missionary was able to enter into the anguished cry of the psalmist for vengeance, and truly approach a partial understanding of the feelings of those men. Has the Westerner the moral right to judge the refugee from the Continent who cries out in anguish of soul at the sight of his bomb-gutted home, and the memory of the brutal massacre of his family under the Third Reich? It would be well if there were no criticism at the expressions grief causes, until one has experienced that anguish in his own life.[7]

There are times when it is entirely lawful to pray for the overthrow of one's enemies, and this prayer may rise from the highest virtue. The determinant of the virtue of the prayer is the motive in the heart of the one who is praying. This is the fourth principle involved in the correct interpretation of the Imprecatory Psalms. Ill-will and revenge in the heart make this desire for the overthrow of evil, evil in itself. However, if good will is felt in the heart,

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[6]Walker, op. cit., p. 183.

[7]Cohen, op. cit., p. 447.

these prayers may be truly consistent with a desire for the protection of the innocent.[8] The question then is one of motive on the part of the psalmists. In the light of the other Psalms written by these men, it is impossible to believe that a spirit of vengeance and personal animosity motivated these imprecatory Psalms. These were men who were servants of the God of Sinai, the God of the Ten Commandments, who gave four precepts governing the relationship between man and God, and six precepts governing the relationships of man with man. Men who truly worshipped this God could not write with such a motive in their hearts. There is a difference between moral indignation and evil hatred. "They admitted that they hated their enemies with a perfect hatred, but hastened to add that they harboured no feeling of revenge in their hearts."[9] As servants of the Most High God, they did not indulge in a spirit of vengeance, for that would have gone contrary to their desire to serve God. In very explicit terms, God has commanded His servants in the way in which they must treat their enemies. "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Lev. 19:18). "Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on

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[8] Hibbard, op. cit., p. 109.

[9] Rappoport, loc. cit.

the Lord, and He shall save the" (Prov. 20:22). Thus, if these men were to remain true to the code and commandments of their God, they could not write with a spirit of revenge in their hearts. It would have gone against the very grain of their morality.[10] (It is noteworthy that David, for example, did not damn the souls of the enemies, but sought that God would carry out the moral or physical law which expresses His will.)[11] On the contrary, they wrote as representatives of the Living God, and as such, denounced the prevalent evil. David is an example of the godly man who seeks God's aid in upholding the right. His enemies were not private enemies, but enemies of the kingdom. His desire to overthrow wickedness involved a greater desire that righteousness might be established. Romans 13:1-4 is very applicable at this point. The character of the enemies must be taken into account, and yet, it seems that the psalmist is not speaking of them in a personal sense, but of the evil they commit. He does not attack their persons, but their evil actions, and their actions are pointed out for just punishment.[12] It is seen then that these Psalms must be

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[10]Hibbard, op. cit., p. 110.

[11]John Sharpe, The Students Handbook to the Psalms (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1894), p. 376.

[12]Hibbard, op. cit., p. 115.

interpreted in the light of the character of the enemies, the evil of their deeds, and lack of personal animosity on the part of the psalmists. These men are spiritual in the very core of their being, and could teach modern Christians much in the way of prayer.

The value of the spiritual triumphs found in the majority of these Psalms is the fifth principle necessary for a fair judgment of these Psalms. If only the darker side of these prayers is observed, much that is valuable is lost. The circumstances surrounding these prayers are such that few modern Christians have been forced to endure. These prayers are a virtual fight against seemingly-insurmountable odds, and a study of them might well lead to a recovery of the part of request in prayer. These were men who "dared to appear naked in their desire before God."[13] At the first examination, these Psalms seem to be supremely self-centered. Yet almost always, these prayers end in a self-transcending element of praise to God.[14] These were men who found actual victory in their prayer to God. They were able to believe God, and to recognize His voice when He spoke. Starting out in great imprecations, these Psalms grow in spirituality as

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[13]Samuel Terrien, The Psalms (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1952), p. 164.

[14]Ibid., p. 161.

they go along. It is typical of these outcrys that they end in a calm, trustful note.[15] These are outlets for inward storms, persistent prayers which are examples of great and abiding faith. Viewed in this light, these Psalms become in the majority of cases, great prayers in which the psalmist, "turning from passionate imprecations against men finds sweet solace from God, to whom he cries from out of his sorrow, night and day." The triumph of trust and praise in these Psalms leads to the question of the true nature of these imprecations.

The only correct view of these imprecations is to judge them in the light of the moral ends desired. In achieving a proper understanding of these moral ends, one must necessarily understand the Hebrew view of God. There is a great gulf between the modern understanding of the essential nature of God, and the understanding held both by the New Testament writers and the Old Testament writers. J. B. Phillips expresses this fundamental gap very well:

> They all had a tremendous sense of the overwhelming Moral Perfection of God. Today, when to many people God is a vague benevolence with about as much moral authority as Father Christmas, this may strike a strange. . .note.[16]

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[15]Alexander Maclaren, The Psalms (Cincinnati, Ohio: Jennings and Graham, 1892), p. 75.

[16]J. B. Phillips, Letters to Young Churches (New York: MacMillan Company, 1955), p. xii.

> . . .under the rigid Jewish Law, God was pre-eminently the God of righteousness, i.e., moral perfection. In these days when the majority of people assume God to be a vague easy-going Benevolence, it is difficult to appreciate the force of . . .problem. If we are prepared to grant the absolute Moral Perfection of God, eternally aflame with positive Goodness, Truth and Beauty, we can perhaps understand that any form of sin or evil cannot approach God without instant dissolution.[17]

It is this dissolution of evil for which the psalmists are praying. Viewed in this light, the imprecations assume a new significance.

Society is indebted to these Psalms for bringing forth the sense of fundamental decency and the fact that God must punish those who are persistent transgressors of His long-range laws. They express the truth that the psalmists found only after long, hard times of prayer and anguish. It is only as this truth of necessary decency is brought out that the principles and practices of love and mercy may be safely advanced in society.[18]

When viewed in the light of the times, as is the common defense of these imprecations, they may be very clearly excused. The theology of that day was largely based upon the Law of Retribution.[19] Temporal rewards and punishments

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[17] Ibid., p. 1.

[18] Walker, op. cit., p. 187.

[19] Sharpe, op. cit., p. 377.

were looked for much more in those days than in present times. God had promised to give to the nation and individual who obeyed Him great blessings. Those who were wicked were threatened with great punishment. This was all geared to a temporal economy. Thus, the very power of God to promote holiness was called into question by the prosperity of wicked nations and individuals. It was this attribute of unchanging holiness, and hatred for sin, which distinguished Jehovah from the gods of the surrounding nations. As has been seen, the psalmists were not indulging in mere personal animosity, or calling down judgment upon the persons of their enemies. The evil which seemed to be a very part of the sinner's way of life was denounced. The establishment of God's righteous rule was the object of these prayers and efforts, and that involved the destruction of those who, in spite of all warning, conspired to promote unrighteousness. A close examination of these Psalms finds that the person is attacked only when that person has consistently refused to repent and serve, only when that person has beyond reparation aligned himself with the forces of evil. These enemies of the psalmists denied the active government of God, and were also defective in social morality. Thus, these enemies of the psalmists were actually the enemies also of God and of society as a whole.

A description of these enemies may be found scattered

throughout the Psalms. It has been the sad experience of the psalmist that these men were seemingly congenitally evil. Duplicity is innate in them. Their "froward" heart leads them to oppress the widow, the stranger, the fatherless. Their imaginations are constantly mischievous, and when in power, the wicked "gathers himself for war." The wicked man of the psalmist is mischievous, morally, socially and religiously. Morally, he is a liar, a slanderer, a perjurer and a hypocrite. The wicked are found both in the place of the lowly and of the mighty, who continually perverts justice into an instrument of oppression. This stems directly from the fact that there is no fear in his heart toward the Lord, and in fact, the wicked openly defies the moral structure of the universe by saying in blasphemous terms that God can neither see nor know of the evil done. These are the vile creatures against whom the psalmist inveighs the judgment of God.[20]

Contrasted to the Moral Perfection found in God, this evil must be eradicated quickly. Not only does this evil oppose itself against the personage of God, it causes the righteous to go astray through temptation and despair, unless checked. If the law were to be flouted openly, and punishment were not forthcoming to overcome the advantage gained

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[20]Rappoport, op. cit., pp. 50-51.

by the flouting of the law, there was little use in living a moral life upon the earth. Thus, the good of God's kingdom was at stake in these cases of flagrant evil. Through the defection of the righteous, evil would make great inroads in the land. Therefore, these violent imprecations against evil, showing the great concern for the kingdom of God on the part of the psalmists.

Despite the great imprecations on the part of the psalmists, it is noteworthy to see that there was no attempt to regulate this punishment. The essence of the prayers of the psalmists was that right would triumph over evil. The desire for swift retribution was subordinate to the will of God.[21] It is safe to say then, in view of the great Moral Perfection of God, that these imprecations despite the violent nature, were actually compatible to that time, showing a healthy instinct for justice, a desire for the establishment of righteousness, and for the manifestation of the glory of God.[22] This also is a necessary principle to observe in the interpretation of the Imprecatory Psalms.

If these Psalms were suitable for those days, there is no reason to believe that they would not be suitable for present times. Although it is doubtful that such violent

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[21]Hibbard, op. cit., p. 112.

[22]Sharpe, op. cit., p. 373.

language would be used today, there is expressed a sentiment in these Psalms which is much nobler than a mere feeble indifference to evil in the world, or acquiescence to this evil.[23] This sentiment, this noble desire for the perpetration of justice, and the glorification of God, was given directly by inspiration of God. This is the final, and most important principle to be observed in the interpretation of these Psalms.

To the critical Conservative, there is no room for the evolutionary hypothesis for the development of the Bible. Although expressed differently in different ages, due to the influence of progressive revelation, morality is ever the same, for the Author continues unchanged. These Psalms are not to be accounted for on the grounds that the Old Testament is of inferior morality, nor that the partial ignorance led to indulgences in moral disposition and sentiment contrary to sound piety. If inspired, these Psalms are in sympathy with divine purity and benevolence. If they are not inspired, they show good argument against other inspiration. The way to see that these Psalms are truly inspired is to compare them with the morality revealed in the New Testament.

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[23]William Barton, The Psalms and Their Story (Chicago, Illinois: Pilgrim Press, 1909), p. 122.

Christ rated the punishment of the Pharisees and Jews greater than that of the Sodomites. A great sense of sin is awakened in the heart, as well as a desire to repent by such statements as "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," or "For our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 10:31, 12:29) Denunciation, even in the New Testament, seems to take on an intensely personal character. "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall." "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil; the Lord reward him according to his works." "Thy money perish with thee!" (Acts 8:20, 22: 3, II Tim., 4:14) "Hymenius and Alexander have I delivered unto Satan, that they might learn not to blaspheme" (I Tim. 1:20). "Delivered unto Satan" is a phrase equivalent to laying someone under the curse of Anathema. In Revelation 6:9, there is a passage which tells of the prayer for vengeance against the evil ones, given by the souls of the martyrs under the altar. These references show that the Old Testament is not apart from the New Testament in its expressions of desire for the hasty overthrow of the wicked.[24] If the New Testament is inspired in this protest against evil, these Imprecatory Psalms are equally inspired.

The passages in these Psalms which seem to be crude to modern concepts were peculiar to the day in which the

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[24]Hibbard, op. cit., p. 109.

psalmists lived. Different culture and different age mark these Psalms as having some undesirable elements. However, there is nothing immoral in them, and they stand "head and shoulder" above the other writings of that day. A comparison of the Hebrew and Ugaritic poetry, for example, shows that the imprecatory Psalms were tame beside the blood-thirstiness of the Ugaritic. They are completely separate in moral tone, with the Psalms having a far loftier concept of righteousness, justice, humble devotion, and joy of salvation.[25]

The Christian view of Psalms should then be one of acceptance. These Psalms are the Word of God, and have great truth to the modern day. Walker expresses the way in which Jesus viewed the Old Testament as the ideal way:

> Jesus reached for the quintessence of a book, and left that which its writers were in the process of outgrowing. He tore off the husks and seized the bright ear of corn. The Fundamentalists in their attitude toward the Old Testament are like a man who, believing that God made bananas, feels it his duty to reverently eat the skin. The modernists are like a man who, seeing that the skin is not good eating, throws away the banana. But those who follow in the wake of Jesus peel the banana, and give thanks for the good fruit that it contains.[26]

The Christian today may find that there is a real need in

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[25]Herbert Livingstone, "Syllabus for Old Testament 7." (Wilmore, Ky.: Asbury Theological Seminary, 1957). (Mimeographed.)

[26]Walker, op. cit., p. 187.

his own life and conduct for an awakened sense of moral justice and righteousness such as these Psalms display. Rejecting the view that the Bible is not the Word of God, but contains the Word of God, and viewing these Psalms in the light of progressive revelation, today's Christian may find new light in his striving for practical godliness through a re-examination of these portions of God's inspired word. With a renewed social conscience, Christianity should attack with new vigor such problems as international slavery, racial discrimination and juvenile delinquincy. The godly men of old had much to say against the inbred sin of an evil world. Christianity becomes ingrown and futile unless an equally uncompromising stand is taken against the evils of the modern world. God grant Christians the courage to cry against injustice and evil wherever it is faced.

CHAPTER VI

AN ANALYSIS OF THE VALIDITY OF THE CONCLUSIONS

It is the purpose of this chapter to examine the conclusions reached by the Liberals and the Evangelicals. This examination of the different conclusions will include, when necessary, an examination of the procedures by which the conclusions were reached.

This analysis is made to show those areas of strength and weakness in both Liberal and Evangelical thought. This too will necessitate an examination of the validity of the procedures used.

It has been left to the reader to compare the strengths and weaknesses of the conflicting views. The analysis has not been made to regiment thought, or support personal presuppositions, but to provide means whereby the problems of the Imprecatory Psalms might be resolved by the individual.

An Analysis of the Liberal Conclusions.

The Hegelian Conclusions. In Hegelian philosophy, the two great groups of religious trichotomies are held to supply the answers for all questions of religious development. There can be no doubt of the significance of Hegel's influence upon the religious thought of the modern world. As Mackintosh has said, "Hegel is still recognized by writers

on the History or Science of Religion as the first great Master of that new and difficult study."[1] The groupings which have been proposed are very suggestive, and his outlines show great detail of thought. When one criticizes Hegel and his results, it must be done with the constant thought in mind that here is a giant among philosophers and thinkers.

Nevertheless, certain areas of deficiency are evident in Hegelian thought. The first criticism must apply to the Hegelian system as a whole, rather than specifically to the study of these Imprecatory Psalms. This is not to say that the criticism is not valid for the Hegelian interpretation of these Psalms.

In the Hegelian groupings of religion in relation to history, there is the ever-present possibility of error through lack of sufficient detail. When an assertion is made concerning the origin of a religious custom or belief, and that assertion has the authority of only philosophical presuppositions, or Hegelian groupings, to be specific, there is always danger that subsequent historical findings, which can be shown to be true and factual, will disprove that assertion. In many instances, further research in archeology has shown that Hegelian groupings do not always

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[1]C. W. Rishell, The Higher Criticism (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1896), p. 47.

prove valid in specific instances.

As applied to Hebrew religion, these archeological findings show that Hebraic thought as expressed in the Bible often transcends those periods to which they have been assigned in Hegelian thought. An example of this may be seen in the Hegelian insistence upon the Hebraic religious evolution from fertility cults. Modern archeology has shown that at an early time in Hebrew history there was a freedom from fertility gods, and that these gods had been introduced as a later innovation.[2]

As applied to the Imprecatory Psalms, it may be seen that the Hegelians often have a tendency to be arbitrary in their assignment of the Psalms to the different periods. Too often emendations are introduced in the text which cannot be supported by historical facts, but must be derived from philosophical principles. In the same way, glosses are often claimed where there is only an Hegelian presupposition to support these claims.

It is a major fault of the Hegelian philosophy of history that it puts all time upon a schedule much as a railway dispatcher's office. As Edwin Lewis, himself a Liberal, has said, "To cancel out these unpredictabilities (of history) by subscribing to a Spinozistic determinism or a

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[2]Wm. F. Albright, Archeology and the Religion of Israel (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1946), p. 113.

a Hegelian dialectism is to put apriorism above simple observation and simple experience. . . .The consistency of logic is well enough, and for its own purposes it is useful enough, but life nowhere perfectly matches it."[3] One might add that spiritual life also never perfectly matches the consistency of logic.

A question arises in the mind at this point. One might well ask if in the very devotion to truth which the Hegelians claim to be their motive, there might not be employed inadequate means for its universal discovery and valuation. If reason is elevated to the position of sole arbiter, and by truth is meant only that which can be tested by the judgment alone, it is a virtual abandonment of Christian groung. Faith and reason must be set in conjunction, not opposition, before any portion of the Bible, including Imprecatory Psalms, may be judged with accuracy.

The relationship of faith and reason must be decided by each individual Christian. However, it must be pointed out that one of the dangers of the elevation of reason to an unjustified position above faith is a tendency to subjectivism. This is evidenced by the conflicting interpretations of both Hegelian and Form-Critic thinkers. When there are such wide

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[3]Edwin Lewis, A Christian Manifesto (New York: Abingdon Press, 1934), p. 64.

divergencies of thought and conclusion in a system as clearly defined as Hegelian dialectics, it shows the extremes to which reason alone can be carried. It is granted that there is room for legitimate differences in opinion, but one cannot help but feel that these differences are exaggerated beyond their reasonable bounds.

The devotion to reason of the Hegelians has been beneficial in producing a new evaluation of the Bible, as witnessed in their interpretations of the Imprecatory Psalms. While not all will agree with these interpretations, a notable service has been done in dispensing with a blind acceptance of the dictates of faith.

The majority of Hegelians have been sincere seekers after truth, not desiring to destroy the Book of faith, but to make that Book acceptable to the modern mind. It must be understood that while some of their methods, as seen in their interpretations of the Imprecatory Psalms, would destroy reverence for portions of the Bible, these methods have not been used maliciously. They would affirm that so far as reverence can be destroyed by criticism, it is unworthy of reverence. While not all Christians would agree with this affirmation, it is readily seen that blind reverence may easily degenerate into stifling superstition. Insofar as the Hegelians have legitimately explored the Imprecatory Psalms, showing their weaknesses, and their

possible religious uses, a definite service has been rendered.

How legitimate the Hegelian exploration has been cannot be decided by the author of this study. This is a matter for the individual, in the light of the facts presented.

The Form-Critic Conclusions. Much of what has been said above may be applied to the Form-Critic conclusions. While Form-Critics would reject the Hegelian framework of historical development, the majority would also base their conclusions upon an evolutionary framework.

The evolutionary assumptions of the Form-Critics are based upon reason, once again at the expense of faith. The results of this emphasis upon reason is shown in the assignment of pre-exilic dates for most of the Psalms, in contradiction to the Hegelian post-exilic dates. The validity of this contradiction is a matter of individual judgment.

The Form-Critics have performed a genuine service in their interpretation of the Bible. The search for the life situation behind the literary form has proven to be a fruitful means of studying the Psalms and other portions of the Bible. While many of the conclusions as to the life situation may be rejected by many Christians, it is a valid means of determining much about the Bible, when used with faith and reason in conjunction.

The life situation behind the literary forms of the

Imprecatory Psalms is generally held by the Form-Critic to be one of priestly activity and ritual worship. The validity of this might well be questioned by other scholars, but it does show the Form-Critic belief in the religious origin of the Psalms. The affirmation of a religious origin for the Psalms is welcomed by the same scholars who would reject the exclusively ritualistic assignment of the origins.

Even as many scholars welcome the Form-Critic belief in the Psalm's religious origin, so do they welcome the stress upon the general religious significance of Old Testament literature, including the Psalms. Evangelical scholars point out that the Hegelian school almost entirely ignored the religious significance of these Psalms. While the Form-Critic stress is welcomed by Evangelicals, there is not general agreement upon the validity of the conclusions reached in interpreting this significance.

It is generally agreed that the factual observations about literary forms have value. While some observations would be rejected by some scholars as too subjective, the majority of these observations may well be studied for added knowledge in interpreting the Psalms and the Bible as a whole.

An Analysis of the Evangelical Conclusions.

In the constantly shifting frontier of theological

controversy there is little real stability of opinion. All thought centers about the presuppositions held in one's world-view and philosophy. This accusation may be made of the Liberal and the Evangelical with equal validity.

However, the Evangelical is especially at fault in his use of the presuppositions of philosophy, even a philosophy which takes into consideration the supernatural. The Liberal makes no claims to having a definitely objective authority. Thus, his reason is his primary guide. The Evangelical, on the other hand, claims to have a definite revelation from God, which constitutes the Bible. The Bible is an objective authority, binding upon his way of life.

Since his way of life is so closely interwoven with the pronouncements of the Bible, the Evangelical feels duty-bound to defend it. In doing this he is at times guilty of intellectual dishonesty. This intellectual dishonesty shows itself in some of the interpretations of the Imprecatory Psalms.

An example of this may be seen in the treatment of Psalm 109. Here the majority of Evangelicals hold that the imprecations of the psalmist are actually the recitation of curses by his enemies. The Hebrew does not support this, and the question arises whether the interpretation is advanced merely as a convenient way of escaping real difficulty. It would be better to face the imprecations squarely, and ex-

plain them in their real meaning and content than to evade the issue. Begging the question never settles controversy, and at times the Evangelicals might be justly accused of this practice.

This is not to say that this is an habitual Evangelical practice, but it is not a credit to their scholarship when it occurs. It occurs primarily in reference to the Evangelical attitude to higher criticism. While one would not demand the surrender of position vital to theological belief before definite refutation of that position has been established, there is a need to recognize valid evidence. Evangelicals believe in the inspiration of the Bible. Yet they tend, at times, to be inconsistent in their practice, for they hold to positions and claims which do not vitally affect the inspiration of the Bible. In relation to the Imprecatory Psalms, higher criticism has made many valid observations. Whereas the Liberal is too quick to accept these results, and thus tends to be destructive, the Evangelical needs to check the tendency to automatically reject the results of higher criticism, per se, for he thus tends to be obstructive.

For those who have a genuine regard for the value of the Scriptures, there is no need to be obstructionists. The Bible will always survive destructive attacks, if it is really the revealed truth of God. Scholarship need not be

destructive, for true knowledge should polish the gems of the Bible rather than mar them.

Although this polishing may be destructive in the eyes of some, when it takes the form of emendation or rearrangement of the Psalms, one must not be too quick to judge the motive behind it. Evangelicals must recognize that Liberals are influenced by philosophical principles which in themselves deny the literal value of the Bible. However, many of these same Liberals would defend the Bible's intrinsic worth. Although their views of the Scriptures do not coincide with Evangelical views, Christian charity demands that they be given an audience. The problem in semantics is the inability of words as a form of communication to convey the real beliefs of the heart.

The Evangelical scholars are to be commended for their honest efforts to preserve the integrity of the Bible as they see it. Whether all will agree with their defense as it stands, one must give them credit for avoiding the dangers of an excessive subjectivism. Although one may not agree fully with the principle of an objective authority, one is forced to recognize the many advantages inherent in such a view.

From their defense of the Bible as an objective authority, the Evangelical scholars have obtained many more principles for daily modern life than have the Liberals. The

doctrine of prayer taught in these Psalms, as interpreted by Evangelicals, is valid for today. Although one may not agree with the interpretation of the Imprecatory Psalms as it stands, it must be admitted that it clearly defines the dividing line between legitimate and false prayer. This might be said of the majority of the conclusions drawn by the Evangelicals. Whether one agrees with the conclusion in these Psalms as such, it might well be applied to modern life.

The view of sin which the Evangelical position advances must be acknowledged as sorely needed for today. International, national, and individual conscience needs a reawakening, and if these Psalms will help in showing the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and the view of God's punishment of this sin, they become legitimate. The dividing line between pragmatism and inspiration must be decided by the individual; this worthy aspect cannot be denied.

The conclusions which would apply the morality of these Psalms to the present day, as in use of prayer and a renewed moral consciousness would seem to be valid. The Evangelical scholars are to be commended, on the whole, for preserving the line between Christian morality and the morality of the Mosaic law. Insofar as the Evangelicals recognize the inherent difference between these two moral codes, and would accept the Mosaic law only as it accords with Christ-

lanity's law of love, one may give accord to those conclusions and their application.

An area in which the Evangelical scholars have surpassed the Liberals, especially the Form-Critics, is the area of the life situation. The Form-Critic formalized the term, but has often failed to carry it to its logical conclusions. When the Setz-im-Leben is limited only to such considerations as would give a possible idea of date or place and function, it cannot be viewed as fully utilized.

Evangelical scholars have often used the life situation approach to judge these Psalms, and have thereby gained valuable insights into their meaning and morality which have been missed by both Hegelians and Form-Critics. This may be seen in the application of the life-situation to those Psalms which Evangelicals attribute to David. The traditional view of Psalm 55 places David at the mercy of Absalom, who is in the process of rebellion. These imprecations are uttered against the enemies, and seem to be fierce and immoral, as do all the Imprecatory Psalms. However, the Evangelical scholar goes back into the life situation of David, and examines the temperament and actions of David before and after these imprecations were uttered. There he sees a passionate man who is quickly aroused, but who also refuses to do anything which would be against the mercy of God as He is known to David. David is seen also to be a merciful man. From

this the Evangelical scholar deduces that David did not mean to enforce his imprecations, and that he was actually waiting for God's action and vindication. The validity of this extended application of the life situation is easily seen.

Thus, the Evangelical scholar is to be commended for his efforts at interpreting these Psalms. Although there may appear to be evidences of intellectual dishonesty, which are magnified by his basic claim that the Bible may be defended from the Bible as well as from other sources, the general effect of the Evangelical interpretations may be held to be valid.

The degree of validity in the conclusions in both theological positions must be judged by the individual. This has not been an attempt to influence belief. It is obvious that there is value in the conclusions of both Liberal and Evangelical. The extent and true worth of that value must be left to the individual judgment.

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